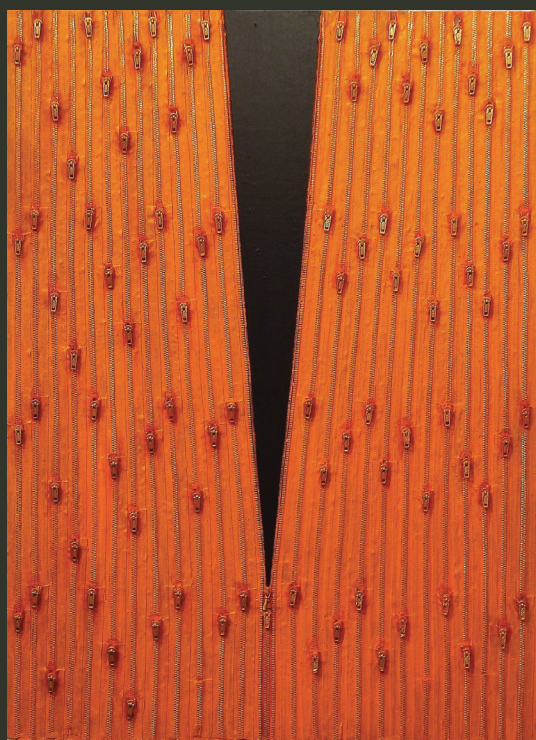


THE HUNGARIAN PATIENT



Social
Opposition
to an
Illiberal
Democracy

EDITED BY
PÉTER KRASZTEV AND JON VAN TIL

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The Hungarian Patient

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Social Opposition to an
Illiberal Democracy

Edited by

Péter Krasztev and Jon Van Til



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For the memory of my grandfather, Lajos Kemenes,
who took part in the anti-Nazi resistance and
encouraged my dissident attitude during state
socialism, and to my daughter, Lili, who took part in
the recent antiauthoritarian resistance.

PK

For the memory of my grandmother, Rose Vydra
Blaha, and to her latest descendant, Graeme Wes Van
Til. She was, and he will be, a strong supporter of
active democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

JVT

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Preface

This volume is envisioned as a kind of a guidebook to the contemporary Hungarian political scene. The case of Hungary, the way this country has slowly deconstructed its democratic institutions, which it had gradually built up over the past two decades, makes it unique in the European context. Hungary is not the only country in the region that aborted its democratization processes—but in the other cases the “immune reaction” of the society was activated, and sooner or later these societies removed their authoritarian leaders from power.

So, the idea behind this book is to lead the reader through the processes by which many groups of Hungarians have sought to strengthen the “immune reaction” of their society by developing new social movements, political parties, and other grassroots formations in reaction to shocks caused by the new regime. The editors of the collection aim to present the major aspects of the situation and to provide a wider context for it.

We begin (Diagnosis) by tracing and analyzing the rise of the Fidesz party and its consolidation as the dominant force in Hungarian society. András Bozóki is a former minister of culture and now a leading political scientist at the Central European University. He sees the regime as having become enmeshed in crony capitalism, in which democratic structures have been hollowed out and replaced by authoritarian elites preaching a gospel of ethnonationalism. Constitutional lawyers Miklós Bánkuti, Gábor Halmai, and Kim Lane Scheppele, together on faculty at Princeton, describe the wild processes by which Fidesz cobbled together a jerry-built new constitution for Hungary in the months following its election win in 2010 with a secure parliamentary majority. This section concludes with a contribution by another prominent law professor, Máté Szabó, who reviews his eventful and remarkably successful term as Hungary’s ombudsman.

In the second section (Symptoms), we look at the current state of several beleaguered groups in Hungarian society: the media, a favorite target for abuse by the regime, as shown by communications scholar Péter Bajomi-Lázár; women, who have increasingly been relegated to backbench roles in post-transition Hungary, as demonstrated by human rights lawyer and sociologist Ágnes Kövér; Romani, who have been given the cheap seats in recent Hungarian democratic policy and practice, as revealed by sociologist Angéla Kóczé (herself Roma); and those in need of social services, who have found themselves needing to turn increasingly to faith-based organizations for social services with the demise of many previously established nonprofit service providers, as noted by Ágnes Kövér in a second chapter. Finally in this section, András Tóth and István Grajczjár turn their attention to the Jobbik party, which has attracted a large group of Hungarians who find comfort and meaning in the ideology and program of the radical right in a time of crisis.

The authors of the case studies in the third section (Immune Reaction) deal with a number of important oppositional movements, all flawed, that have arisen in Hungary. Social anthropologist Péter Krasztev opens the section with a chapter on the hybridization of the Hungarian political system and the social responses this has engendered. This is followed by two chapters on movements that flirted with becoming electoral participants: János Boris and György Vári trace the Solidarity movement from its emergence toward an uncertain alliance with the Together 2014 political effort, and György Petőcz writes of the Milla movement. András Tóth follows with an analysis of the political tragedy of LMP, the green movement that lost its way when it sought to become a political party above politics. Alexandra Zontea, a graduate student at the Central European University and a Romanian, examines student protest movements in an ethnographic study originally written for her master's thesis. And in the final chapter of this section, journalist Gergely Nagy covers the lively scene of cultural expression of protest. Despite differences in professional background, the authors employ similar methodologies: their fieldwork-based research makes for sensitive and informative essays in which they interpret the real motivations behind particular movements and aims of their main actors.

In the final section (Life Perspectives), we begin with political analyst Balázs Jarábik's review of recent history in Belarus, and what this implies about the possibility of Hungary going down the same path. Psychologist Joseph B. Juhász follows with a review of two recent studies in which Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is perceived by his countrymen as father of

his country and as political or even mafia boss. An open-ended concluding chapter by American sociologist Jon Van Til addresses the possible futures that lie before Hungary as it awaits its citizens' decisions.

We proudly present the volume in its lively diversity of styles, ranging from the academic tones of Bajomi-Lázár and Zontea through the journalistic strokes of Petőcz, Boris, and Vári to the lyrical and even avant-garde commentary of Juhász. The contributions of our authors reflect the intelligence, wit, creativity, passion, and diversity of intellect that have for centuries made Hungary a distinctive and significant member of the community of nations.

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We would like to express our gratitude to all friends and colleagues who encouraged us and provided us with useful critiques; to our first readers, Professor László Bruszt and Ivan Krastev; as well as to Professor Judit Sándor and Professor György Majtényi. We feel deeply indebted to all scholars as well as professional, semi-professional and activist photographers, namely Pavol Demeš, Márton Tordai, Hajnal Fekete, Dániel Ránki, and Kelemen Kis, who donated their photographs to this edition. Very special thanks to Gabriella Csoszó, the fully devoted activist-photographer (or photographer-activist, as she prefers) who behaved as our guarding angel during the promotional campaign for the Hungarian version of this book, as well as to Bálint Kaszics, the excellent action-photographer, who not only advised us in visual matters, but practically did all the photo editing of both the Hungarian and the English volumes. We cannot leave without mentioning how grateful we are to the most daring Hungarian publisher, Napvilág Kiadó, which was not scared to publish and promote a book with “rebellious” content, even at risk of losing all subsidies and state-supported funding. We also wish to acknowledge the highly competent help provided by Ágnes Orzóy and Anna Szemere in translating and editing the English texts. And, of course, we are particularly grateful to the hundreds of political and civic activists, politicians and experts, who—with or without name—supported our authors with their statements and information.

Finally, we are truly happy that we had the opportunity to collaborate with these particular authors, and that we had the great fortune of creating a sort of academic micro-community where the authors were able to discuss and develop each others’ ideas and texts.

Abbreviations

4K!	Negyedik Köztársaság! (Fourth Republic!)
BSZF	Budapesti Szociális Forrásközpont (Regional Social Welfare Resource Center of Budapest)
BTK	Bölcsészettudományi Kar (Faculty of Humanities)
CÖF	Civil Összefogás Fórum (Civil Unity Forum)
DK	Demokratikus Koalíció (Democratic Coalition)
DKMKA	Demokrácia Kutatások Magyar Központja Alapítvány (Hungarian Center for Democracy Research Foundation)
Duna TV	Duna TV (Danube Television)
E2014	Együtt 2014 (Together 2014)
ELTE	Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (Eötvös Loránd University)
EMD	Egymillióan a Demokráciáért (One Million for Democracy – Civic Control Association)
ERRC	European Roma Rights Center
EU	European Union
Fidesz	Fidesz Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz Hungarian Civic Alliance)
FKGP	Független Kisgazdapárt (Independent Smallholders' Party)
GDP	Gross domestic product
HaHa	Hallgatói Hálózat (Student Network)
HÖÖK	Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája (Student Union)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Jobbik	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary)
KDNP	Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic People's Party)
KIH	Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Hivatal (National Judicial Office)
KiHa	Középiskolai Hálózat (Secondary School Student Network)
LÉK	Lágymányosi Érdekképviselői Közösség (Local Community of the Student Network at the Social Sciences Campus)
LIGA	Független Szakszervezetek Demokratikus Ligája (Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions)
LMP	Lehet Más a Politika (Politics Can Be Different)
MDF	Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum)
MIÉP	Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (Hungarian Justice and Life Party)

Milla	Egymillióan a Magyar Sajtószabadságért (One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary)
MKKP	Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt (Two-Tailed Dog Party)
MLP	Magyar Liberális Párt (Hungarian Liberal Party)
MMA	Magyar Művészeti Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Arts)
MP	Member of parliament
MR	Magyar Rádió (Hungarian Radio)
MSZP	Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)
MTI	Magyar Távirati Iroda (Hungarian News Agency)
MTV	Magyar Televízió (Hungarian Television)
MTVA	Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap (Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund)
MVP	Magyar Választáskutatási Program (Hungarian Election Research Program)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	Nemzeti Civil Alapprogram (National Civil Fund)
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NIOK	Nonprofit Információs és Oktató Központ (Nonprofit Information and Training Center)
NMHH	Nemzeti Média- és Hírközlési Hatóság (National Media and Infocommunications Authority)
NPO	Nonprofit organization
NZS	Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów (Polish Independent Student Union)
OCÖ	Országos Cigány Önkormányzat (National Gypsy Council)
ÖMA	Ökopolitikai Műhely Alapítvány (Ecopolitical Workshop Foundation)
ORÖ	Országos Roma Önkormányzat (National Roma Self-Government)
ORTT	Országos Rádió és Televízió Testület (National Radio and Television Board)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSI	Open Society Institute
PM	Párbeszéd Magyarországért (Dialogue for Hungary)
SZDSZ	Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats)
SZEM	Szövetségben, Együtt Magyarországért (Alliance, Together for Hungary)
SZETA	Szegényeket Támogató Alap (Fund to Support the Poor)
SZIA	Szociális Innováció Alapítvány (Foundation for Social Innovation)
Szolidaritás	Magyar Szolidaritás Mozgalom (Hungarian Solidarity Movement)
TASZ	Társaság A Szabadságjogokért (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union)
TEK	Társadalomelméleti Kollégium (College for Advanced Studies in Social Theory)

Broken Democracy, Predatory State, and Nationalist Populism

András Bozóki

A new, right-wing government came to power in Hungary in May 2010, led by Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party.¹ Since doing so, it has significantly altered the country's legal, social, and political infrastructure. The 53 percent absolute majority it achieved at the ballot boxes meant a two-thirds majority of seats in parliament due to the disproportionate nature of the electoral system. The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which was in power between 2002 and 2010, received 19.3 percent of the votes only, while a new far-right party, Jobbik, got 16.7 percent, which was interpreted by many as shocking result. These latter parties remained in opposition together with the green party, Politics Can Be Different (LMP), which received 7.5 percent of the votes.²

The governing Fidesz party, enjoying a qualified majority, has unilaterally voted on a new constitution; substantially weakened the balance of power, tightened its grip on public and commercial media; restricted popular initiatives, the freedom of the press, social rights, and civil liberties; and cut social benefits. It has done away with the principle of power sharing. Power is concentrated in the hands of the prime minister, who did everything to centralize his power, to personalize politics, to create a new clientele dependent on the state, and to marginalize the democratic opposition. His notion of “a central arena of power” (*centrális erőter*, mentioned in one of his speeches in 2009)³ has thus become a reality. The democratic state was taken over by a small, coherent group of political entrepreneurs who use the state largely to their own advantage.⁴ They offered neoliberal economic policies for the upper classes and ethnonationalist, populist discourse for the poor. This is an unorthodox variant of crony capitalism in the European semiperiphery. Such an autocratic turn is unprecedented in the history of the EU. Between 1990 and 2010, Hungary

had been a functioning liberal democracy when judged against the principles and practices of a modern, Western-style democracy—that is, characterized by competition between political parties, the participation of civil society, and respect for civil rights. By 2011, the democratic political order had fallen into a crisis in Hungary and has remained under attack by the government. The ruling party has succeeded in deconstructing the components of a consensus-based liberal democracy in the name of a majoritarian democracy.⁵ But Orbán has gone even beyond this, since the elimination of independent institutions has transformed this so-called majoritarian democracy into a highly centralized, illiberal regime.⁶ The “majority” today is nothing but an obtuse justification for the ruling political party to further cement its power in a country where the majority of citizens believe that things have gone badly awry. If this so-called “revolutionary” process continues, the result will be a decidedly semidemocratic state, both in the short run and, if the government has its way, in the long run as well.

This antiliberal turn did not emerge out of the blue: it was a direct response to the hectic reforms implemented by previous governments between 2006 and 2010, as well as the ensuing corruption and economic crisis. The rise of the Orbán regime has deeper roots as well, ones that point to structural, cultural, and political factors that evolved over the period of posttransition Hungary. These include the early institutionalization of a qualified majority consensus, which has obstructed reforms over the past two decades; a plethora of informal practices, ranging from tax evasion to political party financing, which have stalled formal democratic institution building; and the serious impact of existing democratic forms on competition between political parties, which has gradually killed off both the willingness of civic groups to engage in politics and incentives for results-based performance by governments and instilled a hatred in the populace towards politicians and politics. The survival of privileged and influential social groups on the other side of transition has also weakened networks of solidarity. Finally, the failure to achieve meaningful economic reforms made the country defenseless against the global financial crisis that exploded in 2008. Taken together, these factors have produced a perfect political storm.

The Reasons behind the Establishment of the Orbán Regime

1. The early institutionalization of the compulsion to form a consensus

During the transition to democracy in Hungary, consensus building was perceived as a “prestigious” political measure. The “Founding Fathers”⁷ of democracy at the roundtable talks wanted the new, democratic institutional system to be placed on as wide a consensus as possible. Meanwhile, the outgoing representatives of the old regime wanted to retain their voice in politics. As a result, a complete set of rules was born that were intended to strengthen the new democratic order, its stability, and its governability, including the qualified majority rules, which affected a wide spectrum of policy issues. Apparently, the Founding Fathers believed that they could safeguard freedom by increasing the number of decisions that required a qualified majority vote.

These measures created a democracy in which, between elections, the ruling government’s power became almost cemented. It became nearly impossible to remove an incumbent government from the outside; however, this simultaneously made effective governance more difficult. The government in power, due to the large number of qualified majority rules, had to rely on the *opposition* to make decisions on basic issues. Paradoxically, the constitution thus both greatly increased the power *and* limited the political responsibility of the government.

In 1989, the Founding Fathers exhibited an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of power. They wanted a strong, democratic form of government based on wide popular support; at the same time, they were averse to the very idea of power itself. To ensure the country’s effective governability, the Founding Fathers provided excessive safeguards to the political system in comparison to other segments of society.⁸ Simply put, they overestimated the populace’s desire for stability. What they did not take into account was that the illusion of stability over the long haul could make the system inflexible. The desire for stability is not only associated with the legacy of the era of János Kádár (a communist chief who ruled the country between 1956 and 1988), but is today linked to the hectic, new capitalist system of the past 20 years and the injustices it produced. Hungarian democracy, in the formal sense, is the most stable in all of Central Europe, because since 1990, all coalition governments completed their four-year mandates. However, formal stability has come with a price because regulation has largely prevented the political system from correcting itself. The constitutional system between 1990 and 2010 guaranteed that the gov-

ernment remained in power for the entire cycle, thereby ensuring the governability of the country; however, it also straitjacketed the incumbent government via the qualified majority rules. These measures, raised to the constitutional level, proved mostly counterproductive. There are additional institutional and structural reasons that explain Hungary's inability to react quickly to external challenges,⁹ and why Hungary became more vulnerable than other countries during the global crisis. Psychological and institutional stability are valuable facets. However, it has become clear that making a fetish of stability has thwarted the country's development.

2. The practice of informality

Throughout its history, Hungary was frequently an occupied country, and this produced a political culture characterized by a prevalence of informal practices and a lack of institutional accountability. Hungarians learned that they only had to feign obedience to the rules imposed upon them by foreign invaders: below the surface, they established a system of informal rules governing society and culture. Hungarians lived with the duality composed of formal and informal rules, rules which most often were inherently ambiguous and contradictory. Therefore, Hungarians learned to get their way around these rules in a conniving fashion, finding loopholes and cutting corners, and this behavioral pattern remains deeply engrained in Hungarian society. They gave the proverbial emperor what the emperor demanded, but they also evaded taxes where they could. They began to push for individual interests vis-à-vis the government by organizing informal networks and small groups; however, they did not form formal organizations such as unions. Civil society groups and unions helped individuals orient themselves and survive, not through collective action but rather via hush-hush negotiations.

The Kádár regime became a "soft dictatorship" because it was softened by lies. The reason it became more livable is that the system often did not take its own rules seriously. Practicing the system of double rules continued, and one had to navigate the maze of formal and informal rules with caution. Under Kádárism, citizens grew accustomed to those procedures that made the dictatorship bearable. For Hungarians, the old system was not nearly as bad as it had been for the Poles, the Czechs, or the Romanians. Thus, in 1989 Hungarians broke only with the institutional system of dictatorship, not with the customs and informal procedures associated with that system.¹⁰ The corrupt nature of the Kádár regime made it easier for people to maneuver within the system, but it does not necessarily fol-

low from this that every system is better off corrupt. Moreover, illusions attached to the Kádár regime made it all the more difficult to break with its political culture. The political sphere assumed increasing power over various segments of society, from the media to the economy, from education to the social sector to theater. Election results determine who may become a newspaper editor, school principal, theater director, or economic leader. In Hungary, in contrast to the standard practice in other democracies, it is extremely important which party is in power. This means many people's financial security depends not on professional merit and performance, but rather on the given political circumstances and the ability of people to position themselves. This frustrates all of those who wish to serve in their respective fields professionally. The society has been built on the phenomena of informality and clientelism, so political parties use these to deepen their influence through its practice.

The main issues during the past 20 years of Hungary's democracy did not primarily have to do with the constitutional problems of 1989, but rather the ambivalence of Hungarian society to the formal political institutions. The period following the 1989 revolution often surprisingly resembles the era before the revolution, because society often tries to fashion its own informal customs to the new rules.

3. The phenomenon of "partocracy"

During the second decade of democracy in Hungary, party politics superseded almost all other aspects. The confrontation between the ruling government and its opposition became so intense that it became nearly impossible to solve the country's problems through negotiations, which would have required responsible policy debates and wide-ranging consultations. Fidesz initiated the confrontation—when it was in power, together with the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP) and the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) between 1998 and 2002—as a means of strengthening its initially weaker political position. It was determined to divide society using a politics of symbolism. Public discourse was based on party allegiance, and such discourse could not replace (or at least complement) the necessary policy dialogue or the unbiased popular discourse. Fidesz's main rival was the MSZP, which came back to power in 2002 and ruled the country until 2010. Of its eight years in power, it was in coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) for six years. The phenomenon of "partocracy" appeared: what had once been the one party state was replaced by the state of democratic parties.¹¹

There are several reasons for the political crisis in Hungary that unfolded after the autumn of 2006, and one of them is the rule of the parties. The reforms announced in 2006 by Ferenc Gyurcsány, the MSZP prime minister, did not take the power of partocracy into account. In a strong democracy, party pluralism unfurls within the legal framework and is checked by other actors in the system. Accordingly, competition between the parties cannot transform into the dominance of the parties. In Hungary, however, a system was established whereby democratic power is exercised almost exclusively by the parties, and for this reason the welfare of the public became secondary to the interests of the parties. In the meantime, the rising level of voters' identification with parties and the polarization of the party system created an atmosphere of what many Hungarians called "cold civil war" between the left and right. Behind the sharp rhetorical struggle, a system of codependence has evolved that governs the relationships both within and among the parties, and one of the most important elements of this system is its policy of rewarding and threatening individual members. Thus, party leaders could maintain both confidence and solidarity with one another, because they knew everything about each other's affairs.

In Hungary, parties assumed civic duties. It was the parties that organized movements; it was the parties that established public benefit foundations, professional groups, and civic circles. Parties were the ones that delegated curators to various committees; they sought the expert advice of their own experts and even had their own journalists writing media reports. In such a system, there were no independent economic experts and market players, only think tanks that were sustained by the parties and their straw men. In this system, affairs could be settled only through the parties and their clientele. The state was a state of the parties, together with its tax authority and security forces.

The particular features of the Hungarian political system—including the collection of candidate nomination slips, the high threshold to enter parliament, the large number of regulatory areas in which a qualified majority is required in order to create laws, the opacity of political party financing, the privileged position of political party foundations, and so on—facilitated the survival of existing parties and made it difficult for new political forces to enter parliament. Hungarian electoral laws were among the least proportional in Europe. That said, a strong democracy does not equate to enshrining in law the opportunities provided by a multiparty system. The Hungarian system was characterized by a highly politicized society and by the excessive sway that political parties held in various

areas of public life. This eroded the autonomy of certain segments of society and furthermore impeded the entire system's capacity for innovation. If a society's progress depends not on economic performance but on party loyalty, then people lose interest in producing genuine results.

As partocracy increases within a democratic regime, corruption becomes an increasing temptation. It is no coincidence that to this day Hungary has no fair party finance law, nor are there any strict rules against the conflict of interests within the decision-making bodies controlled by political parties. Corruption does not seem to be an external problem, but rather an integral part of the system.¹²

4. Democracy of privilege

That people lost faith in democracy is presumably partly the responsibility of those who form public opinion. After 1989, the roles of the intellectuals changed: their goal was no longer to stand in for an absent democracy, but rather to foster dialogue, offer alternatives, contribute to public affairs independently from political parties, participate in public debates, shape values, and raise doubts and fundamental questions.

Only a few journalists faced the fact that several of their colleagues were becoming the mouthpieces of various political and economic actors, rather than expressing independent opinions and exposing issues without masquerading the facts. What should we think of the Hungarian politicoeconomic elite, which for 20 years was unable to produce new ideas, behaving like a witch doctor at times, prescribing the same remedy for every illness? The intellectuals, many of them followers of neoliberal teachings, did not question whether it was true that privatization and deregulation automatically cured economic ills. They did not venture to view the state and the market in a more balanced light (i.e., to recognize that the economy and society have mutual effects on one another). Political analysts were stuck giving their so-called value-free comments on the superficial power games of the political elite and did not offer meaningful insights on the substance of democracy. Political scientists, if they were to take their profession seriously, should have assessed political phenomena in the social contexts in which they emerged; they were also expected to offer more profound analyses on the relationship between politics and society than they did. If civil society representatives turned a blind eye to the processes that were destroying democracy, it was no wonder that the elected politicians themselves did the same. Politicians do not live outside the parameters of society; they only do what society permits them to do. The intellec-

tual elite tended to forget that democracy might not be solely the affair of politicians, though naturally politicians bear greater responsibility for it than do others.

After 2000, the intellectuals became the guardians of the status quo. It seemed that the patience of the lower classes of society was endless; it also seemed that many of those who received higher levels of compensation from the state could succeed in the economic transition. Not only did the memory of the transition become unpopular, but the entire political class lost its credibility. A significant portion of the intellectuals were responsible for the fact that in the decade following the turn of the millennium, the consolidation of democracy turned into a farcical chasing of illusions.

Between 2006 and 2010, proponents of the ill-conceived reform policies of the formerly ruling MSZP and SZDSZ parties tested the patience of hundreds of thousands of people falling into poverty. One particular feature of the privatization process in Hungary was that after an initial period of spontaneity, foreign capital had the greatest ownership over the economy. Under these circumstances, the unconditional acceptance of the system by the left, the discourse of “There is no alternative”¹³ suggested that its followers were on the side of foreign capital and not the local Hungarian population. The system did not become popular within the electorate, and this perception therefore sealed the fate of the left-liberal elite. The democratic center did not offer an alternative, for example, with an empathetic, plebeian type of politicizing to voters. Thus it gave way to the extreme right, which in its campaign slogans sent the following message to hundreds of thousands of uprooted people: “Hungary belongs to Hungarians.” Nearly by definition, if social solidarity is lacking from the politics of the left, that value is lifted up by the extreme right based on ethnonationalist rhetoric. In the battle for economic survival, the ethos of the fight for civil rights faded. In the conditions of the neoliberal variant of capitalism, the labor market had already increasingly become divided into the camps of “important people” and “redundant people.” Furthermore, the technocratic elite often proved incapable of easing social tension. Exclusion from the labor market for extended periods and social marginalization served as the bases for the upswing in momentum of radical antidemocratic movements.

5. Failed reforms and the economic crisis

The political transition of 1989 did not mark the end of the transformation from the old regime. Economic reforms and new institutions were needed, and the new constitutional framework required content. Achieving this would have required credible politicians, or people who would swear on their lives that their ideas were not just empty rhetoric feeding the mass media. In the autumn of 2006, with its own credibility shaken, the Hungarian government submitted a vote of confidence to go ahead with the reforms. With no vote of confidence, it seemed that society did not support the reforms. Against this backdrop, how could reforms have been pushed through? Perhaps the reforms would have succeeded had the MSZP-SZDSZ government clarified the rules of the game beforehand. At the time, Gyurcsány's proposed anticorruption legislation was the only reform effort that could have garnered substantial popular support; however, this initiative also failed to pass, because the coalition parties of the time nipped it in the bud.

In Hungary, the terms “reform” and “austerity” became conflated. The political elite should have realized that instead of making decisions in a coup-like manner—decisions that would affect the livelihoods of many—they should have held a dialogue with stakeholders. They should have been able to explain and convince voters of the anticipated long-term benefits of their policies. The disillusionment that followed was escalated by political scandals. The prime minister's speech of May 2006, held in closed circles at Balatonőszöd (and leaked by opponents from within the party in autumn 2006), shocked the public and made it impossible for the reforms to garner popular support. The credibility of the planned reforms was questioned to the core: the very person who had initiated them had admitted before his fellow party members that he had earlier not spoken truthfully and misled voters before the elections.¹⁴

The poor design of the reforms generated intense debates that would last for years to come. Yet none of the debates made it any clearer to voters whether the sacrifices they were making for the reforms would be worthwhile. The government had no vision concerning how health care, transportation, or education would improve for citizens; deregulation and promarket economic policies, inherited from the transition period, were its sole plans. Moreover, communicating the reforms was limited to internal discussions within the political parties. The global financial crisis of 2008 reached Hungary at a time when the government was rapidly losing its political credibility domestically. The result was the nosedive of the Hungarian economy.

Only an agreement with and a quick loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were able to save Hungary. Gyurcsány's resignation in the spring of 2009 was a direct result of the economic crisis. His departure led to Gordon Bajnai's one-year "crisis management" term in office, and, indeed, short-term crisis management took precedent over long-term reforms. It became obvious to everyone that the socialist and liberal forces behind the government would suffer severe losses during the 2010 general elections.

For the previous 20 years, the strategic vision that had existed in Hungary during the transition period was precisely the need for successful reforms—yet this was entirely missing. The prime ministers who had exchanged hands often wanted to both implement reforms and please those who opposed reforms. Not one prime minister tried to break with the rule of political parties; rather, each merely hoped that the partocracy would simply accept the reforms. In 2008, voters in a referendum initiated by Fidesz rejected the introduction of tuition fees in higher education and partial copayment within the health care system. In addition, they supported the withdrawal of the already-implemented system of visit fees to be paid to doctors. It became apparent that the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition had exhausted its political reserves. Thus, the government became weak, burdened by the demands of political governance and people's severe lack of confidence in the bureaucracy. Consequently, by 2010, the government had become defenseless against the emerging autocrats. The promise of "a strong state" enabled antidemocratic endeavors to gain popular support.

A democratic state does not rest upon the tips of bayonets: it is strong when it enjoys the trust bestowed upon it by its citizens and weak if this trust is lost. During the 2010 general elections, voters began to see the Hungarian conception of government as producing a weak Weimar state that could not maintain order. Voters increasingly believed that this weak government had turned Hungary into the country that could be labeled an "also-ran" in the race for democracy in the region. The need for a definitive majority and strong political leadership increased. The attitude of many could be summed up as follows: "We do not know what is to come, but because what we have now cannot continue, bring on the unknown!"

The Orbán Regime and the Crisis of Hungarian Democracy

Despite the serious structural problems described above, for 20 years the Hungarian political system was a liberal democracy characterized by a multiparty system, free elections, representative government, strong oppo-

sition, free media, strong and respected institutions that protected the rule of law (i.e., the Constitutional Court and the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights), and independent courts. Barring a few striking exceptions, human rights were generally respected, and religious freedoms were not restricted. During the two decades after 1989, incumbent governments lost every election (with the exception of 2006), the media criticized politicians heavily, democracy was consolidated, and Hungary joined the EU. The above-discussed problems notwithstanding, Hungary remained, until the eve of 2006, a success story of democratic consolidation.¹⁵

By 2011, however, Hungarian society was forced to come to terms with the fact that the system of increasing freedom over previous decades had come to a standstill, and it was turning in an autocratic direction. This raised the following questions: Is it possible to roll back history? Is it possible to return to a semiauthoritarian regime as a full-fledged member of the EU?

1. Conceptual underpinnings

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's policies are based on the pillars of (1) a central arena of power (*centrális erőter*), (2) a rhetoric of national unification, (3) a change of elite, (4) the practice of power politics, and (5) the belief in revolutionary circumstances.

Firstly, Orbán's notion of a central arena of power was intended to eliminate the idea of competition endorsed during the transition to democracy. He wanted to create a system based on monopolizing the most important elements of political power, which are strongly connected with each other through personal networks. In his view, the central arena of power should be filled by the politically homogenized culture of the national community, which is largely defined on the basis of ethnicity. If from the three components of liberal democracy—participation, competition, and civil liberties—the option of competition is weakened or removed (through the modification of electoral laws) and the institutions that safeguard the rule of law are destroyed, hardly anything is left of democracy. That which remains resonates from the era of state socialism: the people's democracy. Orbán does not need economic, cultural, and political alternatives; he strives to establish his own unitary system of values identified with the national interest. Yet where no alternatives exist, there is no room for liberal democracy either.

Secondly, almost all of Orbán's important messages are based on the notion of national unification, which has both symbolic and literal importance. It is used both in foreign and domestic politics. In the case of the

former, he expressly criticized the Treaty of Trianon that concluded World War I, as well as the legacy of the communist system and the forces of globalization, which together he took to be the most important political issues of the day. Orbán suggests that the nation, understood as an extended family, serves as the bastion that offers protection against these forces. The idea of national unification furthermore maintains that Hungarians living outside of Hungary are not minorities but full members of the Hungarian nation with corresponding rights and privileges. As such, these Hungarians are granted Hungarian citizenship upon request, regardless of where they live, and are thus also automatically granted voting rights. Orbán believes that the civic right to freedom, membership in the EU, and being a political ally of the West are only important insofar as these do not contradict the priorities of national unification. Nonetheless, this policy cannot be described as pure ethnonationalism, because the cabinet gave equal voting rights to native Hungarians who live outside Hungary; it was reluctant to grant the same electoral power to those who had left Hungary for the West as economic migrants during recent years. The government distinguishes between the citizens of the same country when it distinguishes between “good” Hungarians deserving of full state services and the “not-so-good” ones who do not deserve the same procedural treatment. Therefore, the rhetoric of national unification belies the practice of selective nationalism.

Concerning domestic politics, national unification refers to the System of National Cooperation (*Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere*, a set of unorthodox policies combining statism, economic nationalism, crony protectionism, and neoliberalism), which has emerged as an alternative to liberal democracy. However, Orbán’s system does not place priority on improving the well-being of the poor, marginalized, and Roma communities, nor does it encompass the concepts of the republic and respect for social and cultural diversity. Through his words, Orbán wishes to give the impression of uniting the nation by basing policies on work, home, order, family,¹⁶ and the feeling of security. These basic, conservative concepts are deeply rooted in the more traditional part of Hungarian society, and the prime minister cleverly exploits the emotional impact of these slogans to sell his politics effectively. Yet the reality is that his policies have divided society. In his dictionary, the term *people* is defined not as a group of individuals or social classes or as a political community in general, but instead represents a selective ethnonational category justified by history as interpreted by him.¹⁷

Thirdly, Fidesz radically changed the administrative elite by replacing not just top administrative office holders but also economic and cultural

leaders tied to the experience of previous decades. The first Orbán government (1998–2002) had used culture to strengthen its own power. By contrast, the second Orbán administration saw cultural pluralism as source of unnecessary cost and potential criticism—and it wanted to eliminate both. It did not engage in a cultural battle because it did not want to argue; rather, it simply changed the administrative elite as broadly and deeply as possible. The aim here was to dismantle the political independence of institutions and to put a group of Orbán loyalists in key positions. Anticommunism was the ideology bolstering this move, which today is no more than a cover for this quest for power. Cultural policies have been replaced by symbolic politics. This endeavor to solidify clientelism sent the message that life outside the System of National Cooperation was unthinkable.

Fourthly, the government's policies were not based on any single ideology because, according to the prime minister, the era of ideologies is over. Viktor Orbán is in no way a conservative politician; he is a nationalist and populist leader who prefers confrontation to compromise. He thinks that competition is always a zero-sum game in which “either-or” choices cannot be transformed into “more or less” kinds of solutions. Instead of ideas, Orbán believes in maximizing power, because for him it is not freedom but tight-fisted leadership that can assure order. Moreover, he believes that he naturally embodies the traditional, patriarchal values of hundreds of thousands of rural Hungarians. Those who identify with this mindset include individuals who are servile towards their superiors but trample upon their own employees. There are also those individuals who are only obedient towards their superiors if they feel that they are under their watchful gaze. Orbán skillfully attacked the banks (most of them being in foreign hands), the multinational corporations, the foreign media, and EU officials on the grounds of economic nationalism and sovereign democracy to earn votes. In the meantime, he introduced a flat tax; restricted the rights of employees, the unemployed, and the homeless; divided trade unions; nationalized local schools; and eliminated the autonomy of the universities. In this situation, privatization and nationalization do not much differ from each other because the state itself is privatized, that is, captured by partisan interests. The party state has been revived in the form of a “family” of power.

Fifthly, Orbán interpreted his electoral victory as “revolutionary.” This allowed him, with a two-thirds parliamentary majority in hand, to employ exceptional methods by making claims to exceptional circumstances (i.e., revolutionary conditions). As a result, Orbán deployed warlike, offensive tactics, pushing legislation through parliament that quickly and systemati-

cally rebuilt the entire public legal system. Fidesz often referred to the ideas espoused in the 1848 revolution led by Lajos Kossuth (i.e., “revolution and struggle for freedom”); however, Fidesz’s own “revolutionary struggle” has undermined freedom. In its stead, Fidesz has established a single-party state in which power rests with the party and the prime minister himself. The state has been captured by a closed group of like-minded political entrepreneurs, a new elite with homogenized attitudes, a group that is using the state to extract resources for its own particular goals under the aegis of the common good and the public interest. Its strategy has been based on a two-way conversion of power: political power strengthens its economic power and vice versa. The qualified parliamentary majority gave the ruling party an extraordinary opportunity to legislate corruption according to its interests. As it turned out, corruption was no longer a set of deviant practices coming from outside the state. On the contrary, it became the leading principle of the state. Corruption, which used to be deviant behavior, became the norm. It is invisible because it is the law itself, defended by the refurbished Constitutional Court. Paradoxically, from a democratic point of view, the problem is not so much whether people in government break the law but whether they keep it.

While most people wanted to remove the Orbán government from office, they were unable to find a viable political alternative since the opposition has been fragmented for so long. Also, there was no visible group of dissidents within Fidesz who were critical of Orbán and could offer an alternative vision for the center-right. Therefore, the will of the leader is largely definitive and faces no internal limits.

2. The building blocks of the system

Hungary, a member state of the EU, which used to be a consolidated democracy, suddenly found itself skating on thin ice. The uniqueness of the situation lies in the fact that there is no example of a reverse transition within the EU so far; no member state has ever returned from democracy to autocracy. Perhaps the most troublesome development of this reverse trend was the constitutional coup d’état that created a one-party constitution in April 2011 (the Fundamental Law) that came into effect on January 1, 2012. To quote Kim Lane Scheppele, the “revolutionary” legislation went through in the following way:

[Fidesz] won two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament in a system where a single two-thirds vote is enough to change the constitution. Twelve times in a year in office, it amended the constitution it inherited. Those amendments removed most of the institu-

tional checks that could have stopped what the government did next—which was to install a new constitution. The new Fidesz constitution was drafted in secret, presented to the Parliament with only one month for debate, passed by the votes of only the Fidesz parliamentary bloc, and signed by a President that Fidesz had named. Neither the opposition parties nor civil society organizations nor the general public had any influence in the constitutional process. There was no popular ratification. . . . By James Madison's definition, Hungary is on the verge of tyranny. . . . the Fidesz political party has gathered all the powers of the Hungarian government into its own hands, without checks from any other political quarter and without any limits on what it can do.¹⁸

The new Fundamental Law approved by a parliamentary majority was the result of a unilateral government process that did not reflect a national consensus. The new text kept several portions of the 1989 constitution; however, it “protects” individual freedoms by lumping them together with communal interests, and in this sense does not in fact place value on individual freedoms. The Fundamental Law openly refers to Hungary as a country based on Christian values, which is not only exceptional in Europe but also unusual among the neighboring Visegrád countries. Though the Fundamental Law (in one sentence only) formally maintains the form of a republic, it breaks with the essential notion of a republic, changing the name of the country from Republic of Hungary simply to Hungary. The text increases the role of religion, traditions, and national values. It speaks of a unified nation, yet certain social minorities are not mentioned with the same degree of importance. In its definition of equality before the law, it mentions gender, ethnicity, and religion yet does not extend this definition to include legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.¹⁹

The 1989 democratic constitution was inclusive and consensual. By contrast, the new Fundamental Law serves as an expression of a “national religious belief system”—a paganized Christianity. It is a vow in which Hungarians list all their sources of pride and hope and pledge to join hands and build a better future, parallel to Orbán's System of National Cooperation. The Fundamental Law was signed on the first anniversary of Fidesz's electoral victory on Easter Monday, April 25, 2011, which blasphemously was said to symbolize the alleged rise of Christianity in Hungary. Bizarre parallels were drawn between the resurrection of Jesus and the new Fidesz constitution, which also made it clear how one is to interpret the separation of church and state in Hungary today.

The shortcomings of liberal democracy discussed above, the global economic crisis, and the determined anti-liberal-democratic policies of the Fidesz government have together produced a perfect political storm.

Though Fidesz was silent during the 2010 campaign about the most important tasks it would need to carry out after its anticipated victory, once in power, Orbán began constructing a new system to replace, as he put it, the “turbulent decades” of liberal democracy. As a first step, he issued the Declaration of National Cooperation and made it obligatory to post this declaration on the walls of all public institutions. In fact, the essence of the new system is that anyone who agrees with the government can be a part of national cooperation. However, those who disagree cannot be a part of the system, because the system is based on submission to the ruling party.

The government majority, upon Orbán’s recommendation, chose not to reappoint László Sólyom as president of the republic, an individual who previously made significant pro-Fidesz moves but nevertheless guarded the autonomy of the presidency. Servile Pál Schmitt, a former presidential member of Fidesz and European Parliament representative, was appointed instead. In addition, the new government saw the 1989 constitution as a heap of purely technical rules, which Orbán has since shaped to fit the needs of his current political agenda. If any of his new laws proved to be unconstitutional, it was not the law but the constitution that had to be changed in his view. An extreme example of this was when the parliamentary majority enshrined the concept of “decent morality” in the constitution in July 2010 and subsequently removed it in November. Meanwhile, Fidesz cited decent morality only when it suited its interests. Accordingly, this amendment sent the message that the concept of decent morality can be modified at any time in the name of the majority.

In the autumn of 2010, when the Constitutional Court repealed a statute that had retroactive effects that it found to be unconstitutional, Fidesz immediately retaliated by amending the constitution and limiting the Constitutional Court’s jurisdiction. Overnight, the Constitutional Court turned from a controlling body, a real check of the legislature, into a feeble controller of the application of the law. The chairperson of the Constitutional Court had hitherto been chosen by the members from within their own rank; however, according to the new rules, it was parliament that was to appoint him or her. In addition, the number of judges was increased from 11 to 15, and the court was packed with right-wing personalities and former politicians known to be close to Fidesz. The government majority did not (despite long-standing criticism of the rule) do away with the possibility of reappointing judges, and hence they may continue to be kept in check politically.

The government propaganda aimed to equate Fidesz voters with “the people.” Thus it justified the arbitrary decisions of the government by

referring to the mandate it received from the electorate. Public institutions, for instance, have been renamed “government institutions.” Furthermore, the Orbán administration has introduced laws that allow for the immediate dismissal of public employees without cause and, along with this, the cleansing of the entire government apparatus. As a result, central and local public administrators have quickly become politicized and riddled with conflicts of interest. All important positions, including those in the independent institutions, have been filled with Fidesz cadres. For the position of prosecutor general, the party appointed a cadre who had previously been a Fidesz political candidate and who, subsequently during the first Orbán government, was the “trusted candidate” for the job. For president of the European Court of Auditors it appointed a person who until May 2010 had worked as a Fidesz parliamentary representative. Another former Fidesz representative became the president of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), and the spouse of an influential Fidesz representative was appointed to head of the newly created National Judicial Office (KIH), which serves as the administrative body of the judicial branch. Similarly, the Hungarian Financial Supervisory Authority and the Budget Council came under political party influence. A Fidesz politician became the president of the National Cultural Fund while simultaneously serving as the president of the parliamentary cultural committee, thus overseeing his own job. A right-leaning government official took charge of the ombudsman’s office, doing away with the independence of the institution forever. Most of the above-listed cadres have been appointed for 9 to 12 years. Therefore, they can stall or indeed prevent subsequent governments from implementing policies that go against those of the current one.

The members of the executive and then president Pál Schmitt competed over who would become the most effective engine of legislation. They imposed a retroactive 98 percent punitive tax on individuals linked to previous governments. Moreover, they launched a central campaign against certain former politicians, government members, and officeholders, not to mention left-wing and liberal intellectuals, with the aim of criminalizing them. The state-sponsored television news reports began to resemble crime shows. Instead of political debates, for example, they broadcast news stories of denunciations. Furthermore, the prosecutor general accused former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004–2009) with influence peddling, a statutory crime.²⁰ Another example is the smear campaign that was launched against the philosophers of the former Budapest School, who were accused of having received too much support for their research.²¹ These accusations had anti-Semitic undertones.

State-backed media replaced public radio and television channels. Their programs heavily underrepresented opposition politicians and intellectuals leaning towards the opposition. The media laws of 2010 created the NMHH, and the individuals who are in the decision-making positions of this body are all close to Fidesz. The NMHH can issue financial penalties at its discretion not only to radio or television programs that fail to abide by the media laws, but also to print or electronic media, and even to bloggers. The penalties can be so high as to silence media outlets completely. The government does all it can to influence the media, from staffing policies through to state-led advertising, which is facilitated by the fact that the Hungarian-language media market is relatively small and can be fairly easily shaped by financial means. Measures intended to curtail press freedom (such as controlling the policies of news agencies and state television, the new editorial practice of outright forgery and manipulation, and mass dismissal of employees) have created an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship among journalists and television reporters. In response to the introduction of the media law, the European Parliament stated that these laws violated press freedom. Widespread European protests ensued. Under pressure from the European Commission, the Hungarian government withdrew some of the provisions of the media law, and the Constitutional Court repealed some of the other provisions; however, the possibility of limiting the freedom of the press remains on the table. The broadcasting operations of Budapest's last opposition radio station, Klubrádió, were suspended.²² In the aftermath of the suspension, television reporters carried out a hunger strike, calling for honest and transparent public media to be restored.²³

The minimum requirement of every democracy is to hold free and fair elections; this allows for a peaceful change of government and enables the incoming government to implement policies that are very different from those of its predecessor. After coming to power, the Fidesz government filled the National Election Commission (NVB), the body responsible for conducting clean and smooth elections, with its own people. The government majority, shortly before the municipal elections of autumn 2010, changed the electoral laws to make it more difficult for smaller parties to gain seats in local government. New laws governing parliamentary elections have also been passed. This meant a change to a one-round system and a complete redrawing of the electoral districts according to partisan interests (i.e., gerrymandering) under the pretext of aiming to reduce differences between the numbers of voters among electoral districts. That said, the electoral boundaries were drawn to make left-wing districts more

populous than right-wing ones, to ensure that votes from the left count for less. Until 2014, only those parties that lost an election could receive seats in parliament in compensation for votes cast for the losing candidates; however, from now on, winning parties will also receive additional parliamentary seats as compensation. The mixed system in place since the 1989 Hungarian electoral law remained largely intact;²⁴ however, the proportionality of the system further decreased. The total number of parliamentary representatives radically decreased (from 386 to 199), since there are fewer and larger electoral districts.

Overall, the new electoral law aimed to filter out smaller parties and political opponents. Meanwhile, Hungary became one of Europe's least proportional electoral systems: the 5 percent threshold required to enter parliament was maintained, and the number of representatives to be elected in individual districts increased while the number of spots for votes cast to party lists decreased. The goal of the new law was to increase Fidesz's chances of winning an election by shortening the electoral campaign period, removing policy issues from elections, banning campaign advertising in the commercial media, and mobilizing voters so as to keep presumably opposition voters away from polling stations. The electoral procedures set out in law tied participation in elections to previous permanent addresses, which diminishes the opportunity of the lower tiers of society, especially the Romani and the poor, to participate in elections.

3. Snapshot of society and political culture

By introducing a flat tax system, the government made clear that its social policies are intended to support the upper middle classes rather than the lower middle classes and the poor. The original goal of the government was to make Hungary competitive among other Central European countries that have lower tax rates.²⁵ However, the result of all of this was a substantial budget deficit, which the government tried to reduce by levying "crisis taxes" on banks and telecommunications companies, alongside a 98 percent penal tax levied on severance payments, which cannot be reconciled with the concept of the rule of law. In addition, the government increased sales taxes (VAT) to 27 percent, the highest rate in Europe; nationalized private pension funds; and significantly cut spending in the areas of culture, health care, education, and welfare.

At first sight, Fidesz's sweeping electoral victory in 2010 seemed to many a populist reaction to previous weak governments. After all, Fidesz promoted economic nationalism and unorthodox economic policies by

levying taxes on banks, launching anti-bank campaigns, and attacking foreign investors and multinational financial institutions. In an effort to balance the budget, the government levied crisis taxes on banks and primarily foreign-owned large companies. At first sight, these measures may seem like typically left-wing economic policies; however, this is a misleading interpretation because Fidesz's unorthodox economic policies were complemented with distinctly antiwelfare social policies. For example, the government now grants tax benefits to families of working parents with children, which means by definition that families with unemployed parents living in deep poverty (most notably Roma ones) are excluded. Social spending on the homeless and the unemployed has been decreased, and homelessness has been criminalized. The time frame for disbursing aid has been reduced, meaning that recipients should receive aid quicker; however, more money has been allocated to mothers who temporarily leave the job market to remain at home with their children. These measures have been justified with the notion of traditional, patriarchal family values. The Orbán cabinet openly defended its antiwelfare policies, which were rare in continental Europe, where the majority of countries aimed to establish a social market economy that they have labored to protect since after World War II.

In the meantime, the government nationalized the reliable private pension insurance system so quickly that people were left with no other rational choice but to move back into the state-supported pension system. By absorbing these pension funds, the government was able to meet the Maastricht criterion having an annual budget deficit below 3 percent of GDP for 2011. One year later, the government forced even those who had chosen to remain in the private system into the state pension system. By this point, there was no question of freedom of choice: in getting its hands on the wealth of the people, the government behaved like a cop-turned-thief. Thus, in Hungary the basic principles of constitutional law, such as respect for private property, freedom of contract, and legal certainty, came into question. While the government's propaganda played anti-EU tunes, it designed measures to reduce costs, following EU directives, all in the name of responding to the economic crisis. Government leaders launched a verbal crusade, lambasting the sins of economic neoliberalism and promising a national rebirth; however, in reality, the government itself was carrying out neoliberal policies, the sole purpose of which was to protect and benefit its own elite and a narrow class of people.

The government took several steps to prevent people from expressing opposition or dissatisfaction in a formal and organized fashion: it made

the labor code stricter, which hurt workers, and it abolished traditional forms of dialogue between employers and employees. Moreover, unions were forced to merge with an emerging corporate structure. Limits placed on union rights curtailed the rights of workers to call for a strike. Furthermore, government-supported media outlets launched a smear campaign against the new generation of union leaders.

Shortly after coming to power, the government established a new Counter Terrorism Center, partly to guarantee the personal safety of the prime minister himself. The annual budget of the organization exceeds the amount set aside for the National Cultural Fund. One year later, it seems that these enhanced security services are not enough to guarantee the safety of those in power. The minister of interior has proposed the establishment of a new secret service; this is still under debate in the cabinet because leaders in power could use this service to keep each other's parties in check, which has (understandably) aroused controversy.

New legislation ensured that public education was managed and controlled by the central government. Local government and foundation schools were nationalized, and a significant number of these schools were placed in the hands of churches. Moreover, through these new laws the government has been homogenizing the curriculum of public schools and has reduced the age until which students must attend school, from 18 to 16 years. The law on public education merged the antiliberal traditions enshrined in the dogmas of communism and Catholicism; it is no longer a question of education but rather discipline, and it declares that the state has the right to intervene in the lives of children and parents. The self-proclaimed "family-friendly" government strives to reeducate families for them to become worthy of participating in the System of National Cooperation. Similar patterns can be observed in higher education. The purpose of the bill on higher education was to limit the number of students that could be accepted to universities and colleges with financial aid from the state. The new laws even required that students retroactively repay tuition fees should they choose to live abroad after completing their studies. On top of it all, the government proposed that some university degrees could only be pursued upon payment of full tuition, which would make the more lucrative professions available to only the wealthy. It was the unspoken goal of the government to reduce social mobility, to bring the process of changing the elite to a close, and to finally entrench the social hierarchy that emerged through a "revolutionary" process in the postcommunist era.

Though the government stressed that it did not wish to return to the past, it nonetheless fed a certain nostalgia for the period between 1920 and

1944, characterized by Admiral Miklós Horthy's nationalist and revanchist policies. Prime Minister Orbán has proclaimed the date of the Trianon Peace Treaty that concluded the World War I the Day of National Unity. Moreover, the government ordered the erection of a statue of German occupation of 1944 in the heart of Budapest, suggesting that all Hungarians had been victims of German Nazism.²⁶ The government politically absolved individuals extolled during the Horthy regime by conferring new honors upon them. Under the guise of national unification, the government granted citizenship and voting rights to Hungarian minorities living outside of Hungary to increase the number of right-wing voters, since the majority living in the diaspora tended to vote for right-wing parties (and would perhaps return the favor for receiving the automatic right to Hungarian citizenship). Orbán has declared that he wishes to politically deal with Jobbik, the extreme-right party, the same way that Horthy dealt with the Nazi Arrow Cross movements back in the day: "give them two slaps on the face and send them home." Meanwhile, various extremist right-wing paramilitary organizations have appeared in villages across Hungary, bearing a range of eerie names, such as Hungarian Guard, Defense Association (Véderő), and Outlaws' Army (Betyársereg). These organizations take away the government's monopoly on force and launch racist campaigns aimed to intimidate Romani. Courts that banned these extremist paramilitary groups were unable to prevent them from reorganizing under different banners.²⁷

The central propaganda rose to protect nationalism, patriarchal family values, power politics, and law and order. The Criminal Code has also been modified such that teenagers can now be thrown behind bars for minor retail theft or painting graffiti. The independence of the justice system has also suffered: the government is making the Office of the Prosecutor General dependent upon personal loyalties, it is curbing the rights of lawyers in criminal proceedings, and, by forcing early retirement upon Supreme Court judges, it is launching a siege against the courts. When it created the *Kúria* (i.e., the Supreme Court of Hungary before the judicial system was reorganized after World War II), it did not extend the term of the president of the Supreme Court (though his mandate had not yet expired). Instead, the government replaced him with a cadre loyal to the ruling party. In 2010, the Fidesz majority in parliament changed the constitution nine times in a six-month period. Thus, the government itself placed the principle of legal certainty under doubt, shaking its own credibility.

The government paid special attention to the members of the national bourgeoisie and has placed high expectations on these individuals to carry

out certain functions. The Orbán system created incentives through tax breaks for popular team sports, such as soccer, the prime minister's favorite. Sándor Csányi, one of the wealthiest entrepreneurs of the country, among others the CEO of OTP Bank that governs over 40% of the sector, became president of the Hungarian Football Federation. The government announced its plans for building a state stadium and several others. It has spent hundreds of millions of forints²⁸ on soccer academies, such as the Ferenc Puskás Football Academy, which has ties to Orbán. Due to forced, "generous" support from different agencies, the local soccer team of the prime minister's village managed to rocket up to the top league within two years.²⁹

In the area of culture, the policies of Fidesz and Jobbik overlap: both have an exclusionary interpretation of the idea of national values. Under this label, both parties go against the equal-opportunity policy of recent years. Though the government protected the National Theater's director against homophobic and extreme-right attacks, it ultimately replaced him with a new, pro-Fidesz director. Moreover, the mayor of Budapest appointed an extreme-right-wing actor as director of the Új Színház (New Theater), who has been working alongside István Csurka, the former president of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), a former extreme-right party. At the helm of the Hungarian State Opera, Orbán (deceiving his own minister) placed a government commissioner, who through his deeds and declarations would within a few weeks come into conflict with the major representatives of Europe's cultural scene. Within a year and a half, all theater directors across Hungary were replaced. In many towns, relatives of the Fidesz clientele have become directors of the theaters. Cultural programs that aimed to decrease social and cultural inequality were terminated. By halting the activities of the Motion Picture Public Foundation of Hungary, the government in effect halted one of the most successful branches of Hungarian cultural life, film production,³⁰ for three years. The government even decided which religions could be regarded as established (Islam and Mormonism, for instance, were not), and it still has the authority to conduct a complete data search on all nonestablished congregations.

The Orbán regime considered some of the most outstanding artists and scholars to be its enemies.³¹ The government had requested some of its artist friends to create illustrations for the new Fundamental Law, to leave a visual trace of historical periods of its choosing next to the text displayed on the mandatory "Fundamental Law tables" in government offices (chairs and tables where people can read a copy of the new constitu-

tion). Kossuth Lajos tér, the large square just in front of the parliament building, was redesigned to remove certain statutes and restore it to its appearance in 1944. The actions of the government officials were full of contradictions: they simultaneously lauded Chinese Communism and anticommunist neoconservatism in the United States; they banned pro-Tibet protests during the Chinese Communist Party Chairman's visit and at the same time put up a statue of President Ronald Reagan, who had called Communism the "evil empire." They turned away from previous symbolic figures of Hungarian democracy, such as István Bibó³² and Imre Nagy,³³ and towards the successors of Li Peng, with whom they "are forging an alliance." In addition, they declared not only that the Communist Party of the past was a criminal organization, but that its predecessor and successor organizations were as well; however, they welcomed some of the former members of the Communist Party into the government and even had these former members write parts of the Fundamental Law.

Surprisingly, despite its qualified majority in parliament, the actions of the Fidesz government could be characterized as blitzkrieg tactics, especially where legislation is concerned. If a government announcement of a new law was expected, parts of it would be leaked days before, thus allowing the government to "prepare" public opinion to receive it. Thereafter, the party's parliamentary group leader or the prime minister's spokespersons would duly deliver the announcement, which would then be immediately submitted to parliament, and, through an individual representative's motion, the bill would be voted into law. The minister of justice, who in theory should be responsible for legislation, in effect had no say in the legislative process. There were no society-wide debates, no professional discussions, no impact assessments, and no obligation to uphold other such procedures considered orthodox in a democracy. The opposition's voice was divided, and it did not filter through the state-sponsored media. Furthermore, a modification of house rules explicitly limited parliamentary debate: proposals deemed important by Fidesz passed through parliament smoothly. This clearly contradicts the notion of a parliamentary democracy, which is based on the idea of holding public debates. Since 2010, analysts, journalists, and commentators have hopelessly chased after events as they unfolded; they could barely keep track of this chaotic pace of legislation, which had been intentionally accelerated. By the time the involved parties and non-state-controlled media outlets realized what was happening, the event would have already concluded.

At first sight, this raid tactic gave the impression of a government determined to govern. Yet what has become clear is that the determination

of the government was to centralize power. When criticized, the government has regularly responded by saying that “the most important talks” with society had already taken place, namely at the polling stations in 2010. Accordingly, the government claims that its policies reflected the will of the people. Work, home, order, and family have become the regime’s watchwords. The popularity of the Orbán regime can partly be explained by coordinated communication by the government about the advantages of strongman rule and by its socially unorthodox policies. The Orbán regime offered favorable neoliberal policies for the rich; a corporatist and clientele system for the middle class; a mix of ethnonationalist, anticapitalist and anticommunist rhetoric for the lower middle classes; policies of social exclusion and demobilization against the Romani and the poor; and finally, the familiar Kádárist paternalism to pensioners.

Yet what is not clear is the following: if it is true that the majority stands behind the government, why did the government have to govern in a coup-like fashion? Indeed, there is no denying that between 2010 and 2012, a constitutional coup unfolded in Hungary, the pace of which was dictated by Viktor Orbán and his close political circle.

4. Power and society

During his first administration between 1998 and 2002, Prime Minister Orbán was more *primus inter pares* in his leadership. After 2010, by contrast, the informal center of power, composed of the prime minister, his advisors, and Fidesz cronies, was simply not in agreement with the decisions of the “system’s Founding Father.” For Fidesz, the idea of the center of power served the purpose of limiting the possibility of fair elections. Concerning the government’s mandate, it was Orbán’s explicit goal to create additional qualified majority rules, which has killed off the possibility for a change of government. And even if a change in government were to take place, the administration strives to ensure that the new government would not be able to carry out policies that contradict its own. Furthermore, the government has restricted the right to strike and the rights of employees; it has reduced the right to assembly, religious freedoms, educational freedoms, and social rights. Rather than maintaining the system of local government, the Orbán administration, after restricting the resources of local governments, placed the majority of their functions under the jurisdiction of the central government.

The Fidesz government promised that after gaining its exceptional majority it would take on the fight against poverty and the social crisis. It

promised jobs, homes, order, and security. It suggested that although some of its measures would be controversial from a rule-of-law perspective, it would in turn guarantee economic and social development. Millions believed this promise. Perhaps they thought that certain democratic practices could be sacrificed in exchange for economic well-being. However, the government has dismantled the limits on the rule of law and has bid farewell to liberal democracy; yet in return, not only did it fail to lessen the social burden of the Hungarian population, but it has sent the message that it has (and had) no intention of doing this. Thus, it set the stage for the rise of the extreme-right party, Jobbik.

To guarantee a return toward liberal democracy, strong opposition parties that are willing to cooperate are needed, along with social movements, an independent press, civic organizations, and heightened international attention. In 2011, the main points of opposition began to appear, including independent unions and increasingly active civic groups that overshadow the dispersed opposition parties, which today remain unable to join forces.

In January 2011, the group entitled One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) sent 10,000 protestors to the streets; by March 15 and October 23, two of Hungary's most important national holidays, this number had swollen to 30,000 and 70,000, respectively. Labor unions organized larger gatherings in April and June of the same year. In October 2011, the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity) was formed, which organized a demonstration of 30,000 people in front of the parliament building; and in December it announced that it would become a countrywide organization. The day before Christmas 2011, representatives and activists of the opposition party LMP chained themselves around the parliament building to prevent parliamentarians from entering. They aimed to draw attention to the legislation being passed by parliament that threatened the rule of law. The police, Ukrainian- and Belarusian-style, accused the protestors of restricting personal freedoms. On January 2, 2012, about 80,000 people protested against the new constitution and the rise of autocracy on the streets of Budapest. Further protests occurred on March 10 and March 15, 2012, with attendance in the tens of thousands. The Orbán government aimed to counter this series of protests by creating its own government-sponsored civic movement, the so-called Civil Unity Forum (CÖF), which organized counterprotests in defense of the regime. Flash mobs, scattered protests, and new movements by civilians (notably university students and artists) emerged in the period of 2011–2012, challenging the political monopolization of power increasingly seen as that of a mafia state.

The biggest rally of the democratic opposition movements occurred in Budapest on October 23, 2012, when leaders of three civic organizations—Gordon Bajnai (former prime minister and head of the Patriotism and Progress Public Policy Foundation, a technocratic think tank), Péter Kónya (of Solidarity, an employees' organization with a nationwide network), and Péter Juhász (of Milla, a broad political platform of urban youth)—declared their decision to form an umbrella organization, called Together 2014 (E2014), inviting other parties of the democratic opposition to create a united electoral bloc for the 2014 elections. With this public announcement, these movements started down the long path to party formation. Since 2012, former civic organizations within E2014 have made several attempts to collaborate with other Parties (MSZP and LMP) for an electoral coalition, but internal rivalry between leaders, growing distrust toward politicians in society, and Fidesz's strong negative campaign did not allow them to make a strong alliance early. The LMP, broke up on this issue: a segment of the party joined the opposition alliance as a new party, Dialogue for Hungary (PM), while those who stayed with LMP decided to let their party run alone in the elections.

Despite the government's efforts, Hungary still retained a few of the basic characteristics of a multiparty democracy. Liberal democracy, however, has been replaced with a warped version of majority rule, where freedom of speech is limited by self-censorship—people do not speak up for fear of losing their jobs—and where press freedom is clearly being reduced to the blogosphere. The state-run television channels have turned toward a tabloid-style approach. The aim is to depoliticize the news or remove political issues from media reports. State-sponsored media outlets, for instance, either failed to report or underreported on mass protest rallies and demonstrations. The country arrived at the 2014 general elections in a situation where Fidesz had a clear advantage.

The period of mass protests (2011–2012) was followed by a long and increasingly self-destructive set of negotiations among the leftist opposition parties (2013). The momentum, offered by the civic initiatives, was lost when still unpopular leaders took over the political process in the opposition. In the meantime, the government introduced its policy of utility cost cuts to regain the support of lower-class voters. Finally, in January 2014, a leftist electoral alliance was created, just three months before the April 2014 elections. It was far too late. The influence of civil initiatives was not strong enough to promote new leaders to the democratic opposition, which was still dominated by those who had lost credibility before 2010. Among several other factors, weak organization, poor

capacity for innovation, and lack of imagination resulted in an electoral defeat in 2014.

5. Free and unfair: The 2014 elections

Hungary's parliamentary elections in April 2014 saw a 61 percent turnout, the lowest since 1998. The high abstention rate was a sign of disaffection with Hungarian politics: four-tenths of the electorate believed it was left without a genuine political choice.

Fidesz, the right-wing populist party, led by Viktor Orbán, received 44.5 percent of the votes, giving it a strong mandate to continue to govern. Thanks to the more disproportionate voting system introduced by Fidesz, the party retained its two-thirds parliamentary majority. However, of a total of 8 million eligible voters, only 2.1 million cast their ballot for Fidesz; this was 8 percent (or 600,000 voters) less than in 2010. Although this result was far from representing national unity, Orbán's charismatic leadership and his anti-EU, Christian-nationalist rhetoric have been instrumental in forging an alliance between conservative voters and the lower middle class, which expected the state to halt its existential decline. In 2002 and 2006—when the previous election system was still in place—this solid, voter base of 2 million strong was not sufficient for a Fidesz victory. This time, it secured the party a supermajority.

The alliance of leftist opposition parties came second with 26 percent of the vote. Led by MSZP leader Attila Mesterházy, the alliance is made up of the MSZP, E2014, PM, the Democratic Coalition (DK), and the Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP). Since the previous elections, the alliance has managed to increase its vote by nearly 300,000, receiving a total of 1.2 million votes. Nevertheless, its performance at the polls has been rightly seen as a crushing defeat. In the last four years, the left has been unable to reinvent itself from the ground up. It has failed to communicate a clear identity or platform; its leaders, who engage in constant rivalry, decided to field a joint list only at the last minute. The primary message of the alliance was a desire to run Viktor Orbán out of office; it had nothing to offer in terms of a genuine and positive vision. The list was dominated by MSZP politicians, whom voters held responsible for the policy failures in the period leading up to 2010. Following their defeat, the leaders of the coalition parties announced that they would be running separately in the European Parliament elections in May.

Third place went to Jobbik on the far right, with 20.5 percent of the vote. This represented some one million voters, 3 percent (100,000 votes)

more than in the previous election. The results for individual constituencies show that Jobbik beat out left-wing candidates in half the country. The elections were, in a way, a great victory for Jobbik, which promoted Hungarian nationalism, radicalism, antiglobalization, and racism. Analysts blamed Orbán for the growing support of right-wing extremists and said that Europe could no longer ignore the far right. In the months before the elections, Jobbik assumed a more moderate tone, campaigning with the slogan of “Livelihood, order, and accountability” and muting its standard racist message. Not only was it successful in the poorest region of the country in the northeast, but it also managed to gain new positions in counties in the west.

The LMP, came last with 5.2 percent of the vote. Although this falls short of the party’s 2010 performance, it may grant green policies a new lease on life. Keeping an equal distance from both the rightist and the leftist blocs, LMP sent a middle-of-the-road, antiestablishment message to its voters during the campaign.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) found that the elections themselves were effective and partly transparent; however, it cast doubt on the legitimacy of Orbán’s landslide victory, commenting on the “undue advantage” enjoyed by Fidesz and the lack of freedom for the opposition during the campaign. The European Parliament, the European Council, the United States, and several EU member states have also openly criticized this abuse. All of them pointed out that Act XXXVI of 2013 on Electoral Procedure was passed without meaningful public debate, in violation of both Hungarian and international practice. Constituency boundaries were shifted around to make left-wing districts more populous than right-wing districts, causing a left-wing vote to carry less weight. Different rules applied to Hungarian nationals working abroad and so-called Trianon Hungarians living beyond state borders. Moreover, under the new system, extra seats were added to the winning party’s list, which made the result extremely disproportionate. These rules violate the principle of equal votes. There has also been a failure to properly regulate a number of important areas connected to campaign financing, such as the campaign activities of satellite organizations. Using public funds, Fidesz outsourced part of its campaign to an allegedly civic organization with close ties to the party, the CÖF. Thanks to new financing regulations, the transparency and accountability of the system have been compromised.

The Media Council set up by Fidesz was not politically neutral in the elections. The acquisition of media companies by investors with close ties

to Fidesz undermined the plurality of the media and forced journalists to self-censor. Regulations introduced by Fidesz prohibited commercial television stations from running financed promotions, which did not stop government ads from being aired. The majority of television channels broadcast reports biased toward Fidesz. Together, these factors gave the government significant and unfair advantages and restricted citizens' access to proper information. The result was a loss of public confidence in the electoral system. Not only did Fidesz campaign as a party, as is usual in any multiparty democracy, but the Fidesz-controlled state administration also "campaigned" by using taxpayers' money to create an uneven playing field. The boundaries between party and the state became blurred. This violated the principles of fair competition laid down in OSCE's 1990 Copenhagen Document.³⁴

The lower middle classes and the poor, victims of the discriminatory government social policies of the past four years, were compensated with utility cost cuts before the election year. While advertising on utility cost cuts is delivered regularly to all Hungarian citizens, the burden of special taxes is borne by various segments of the population in isolation. The majority of the public has been convinced by the media that, despite persistent economic stagnation, "Hungary has been performing better" over Fidesz's four-year term. Nationalist sentiments, paternalism, strongman rule, and an overwhelming populist discourse captured the largest segments of Hungarian voters. By carefully calculating the social impact of his policies, Orbán could effectively minimize the losses of his constituency and keep his party majority. Fidesz's victory can be metaphorically described as a successful rebellion of the countryside against the previous political setup, widely perceived as an elitist democracy.

The Hungarian public has been constantly reminded by its current political leader of the importance of national pride. Individual rights and the democratic institutions that protect them have taken a backseat to constitutionally endorsed policies of collective identity and cultural uniformity. With government propaganda about order, home, fatherland, and family drowning out all other voices, many are voting with their feet: in the past four years, half a million people have left the country.

If society is unable to balance the system against government leadership, democracy is in danger. The proponents of autocratic measures, however, can hardly cement their power, and they cannot stop the clock and preserve the present (which is favorable for them) for eternity. This is an important lesson for those who believe in liberal democracy: they cannot pretend as though all is well, as they have in the past decades. History

does not end with the transition to democracy, because democracy is never a fixed condition; rather, it is a dynamic process, full of tension. In essence, it is but a fragile balance of forces and counterforces.

Conclusion

If Hungarian democracy survives the current challenge thanks to resistance from society, there is a chance that it will be stronger than ever. But the protest movements and the democratic opposition have proved too weak, fragile, and fragmented to alter the dominant, illiberal trend of the past few years. The crisis of liberal democracy calls attention to the fact that democracy cannot be narrowed down purely to institutions, because institutions can be easily hollowed out by leaders who do not respect freedom. Democracy and its values can be preserved only if legions of dedicated people help them thrive.

Notes and references

- 1 András Bozóki (2008), "Consolidation or Second Revolution? The Emergence of the New Right in Hungary," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 2 (2008): 191–231. See this article for more on Fidesz and its ideology. Fidesz (from *Fiatl Demokraták Szövetsége*, Alliance of Young Democrats) was founded in 1988 as a youth liberal, anticommunist party. Now taking the name Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance, it is the major conservative-populist party in Hungary. In 2010, it won the elections in a formal coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), an insignificant political force in itself.
- 2 About the green roots of LMP see András Tóth's chapter in this volume.
- 3 Viktor Orbán (2009), speech in Kötse, www.nagyitas.hu (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 4 See Bálint Magyar, ed., *Magyar polip: A posztkommunista maffiaállam* [Hungarian octopus: The postcommunist mafia state] (Budapest: Noran Libro, 2013).
- 5 Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999). See this book for more on the difference between consensus-based and majoritarian forms of democracy.
- 6 Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The term *illiberal democracy* was first coined by Fareed Zakaria in 1997; this book is his most elaborated version of the topic. Zakaria's approach was later criticized by Levitsky and Way, who claimed that illiberal democracies are in fact not democracies any longer. They instead introduced the notion of competitive authoritarianism.

- 7 The reference here is not to a specific and familiar group of figures but to all those involved in making reforms to the 1949 Hungarian constitution after 1989. Hungary was the only former Eastern Bloc country that did not adopt a new constitution—one of many preconditions for the current problems facing the country.
- 8 András Bozóki, ed., *The Roundtable Talks of 1989: The Genesis of Hungarian Democracy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).
- 9 Zoltán Ádám, “Miért Magyarország?” [Why Hungary?], *Heti Világgazdaság*, June 12, 2013; János Kis, *Az összetorlódott idő* [Squeezed time] (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2013).
- 10 András Bozóki and Eszter Simon, “Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Hungary,” in *Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Hungary, Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Gerd Meyer (Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 2006), 146–94.
- 11 This is a very similar phenomenon to the Italian party system of the 1970s and 1980s, called *partitocrazia*.
- 12 Bálint Magyar (2012), “Az új nemzeti középosztály: szolgáló nemesek és udvari beszállítók rendje” [The new national middle class: An estate of servant nobles and court suppliers], *Élet és Irodalom* 56, no. 10 (March 9, 2012); Bálint Magyar, ed., *Magyar polip: A posztkommunista maffiaállam* [Hungarian polyp: The postcommunist mafia state] (Budapest: Noran Libro, 2013).
- 13 Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). The rhetoric of “There is no alternative” (TINA) was an inherent part of the dominant neoliberal discourse.
- 14 Ferenc Gyurcsány, “A teljes balatonöszödi szöveg” [Full text of the Balatonöszöd speech], *Népszabadság*, May 26, 2007; József Debreczeni, *A 2006-os ősz* (Debrecen: De.Hukönyv, 2012). A recording made at a meeting of Gyurcsány’s MSZP held on May 26, 2006, surfaced in the press in mid-September of that same year. Gyurcsány was heard admitting that “we have obviously been lying for the last one and a half to two years.” This resulted in a series of demonstrations against the government. Even though Gyurcsány and the MSZP did not deny the veracity of the recording, the prime minister refused to resign.
- 15 András Bozóki and Eszter Simon, “Hungary Since 1989,” in *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 204–32.
- 16 Umut Korkut, *Liberalization Challenges in Hungary: Elitism, Progressivism, and Populism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 168–77. This features an elaborate analysis of Orbán’s rhetoric on work, home, order, and family.
- 17 András Bozóki, “Családi tűzfészek: A kultúra a szimbolikus politika fogságában” [Family nest: Culture in symbolic political captivity] in Magyar, *Magyar polip*, 346–67. For instance, Orbán often refers to the Turul, a mythical bird that is supposed to symbolize the common ethnic roots of Hungarians. The Turul replaces the reference to the republic in his speeches. The Turul also refers to “genetically” encoded belonging to an ethnic community, while the modern concept of republic would refer to the nation as a political community. By referring to the former, Orbán revives the pagan traditions that even contradict the Christian traditions of Hungary set out in the Fundamental Law.
- 18 Kim Lane Scheppele, “Testimony: U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hearing on The Trajectory of Democracy; Why Hungary Matters,” lecture at Capitol Visitor Center, Washington, DC, March 19, 2013.

- 19 For a detailed analysis of the new Fundamental Law, see chapter 2 of this book by Miklós Bánkúti, Gábor Halmai, and Kim Lane Scheppele.
- 20 The official accusation was later dropped due to lack of evidence.
- 21 Erik Schliesser, "Translation of Habermas and Nida-Rümelin on the Hungarian Situation," trans. D. P. O'Connell, *New APPS: Art, Politics, Philosophy, Science* (blog), January 27, 2011, http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/01/translation-of-habermas-and-nida-r%C3%BCmelin-on-the-hungarian-situation.html#_ftn1 (accessed June 21, 2014). A public accusation and a police investigation were brought against Ágnes Heller and other left-liberal philosophers in Hungary for allegedly misusing public funds. This was a politically motivated attack, the allegations of which have been tried in court and have so far ended up with rulings in Heller's favor. The charge against the philosophers has been challenged by intellectuals across the world, including Jürgen Habermas and Julian Nida-Rümelin, who published a letter in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on January 25, 2011.
- 22 The attack on Klubrádió represents the last phase of a long-standing trend: since 2006, Fidesz has systematically occupied rural media outlets and created its own newspapers, radio stations, and television channels. Such newspapers include *Helyi Téma*, *Metropol*, *Magyar Nemzet*, *Magyar Hírlap*, and *Heti Válasz*; radio stations include Lánchíd Rádió, Class FM, and Mária Rádió; television channels include Hír TV and Echo TV. Since 2010, public radio and television channels have become strongly influenced by government propaganda (including Magyar Rádió and Magyar Televízió).
- 23 For a detailed analysis of the Hungarian media situation, see chapter 4 of this book by Péter Bajomi-Lázár.
- 24 The Hungarian electoral system at the time of the 2010 elections was a mix of direct election of representatives in single-seat constituencies (176 seats in the National Assembly), proportional representation (152 seats), and 58 "compensation" seats, which were determined through a complex formula based on voter turnout and votes in each electoral round that did not count because they did not go to the winning member. The aim of this mixed system was to try to optimally capture voter preference in the actual numbers of representation of each party in parliament.
- 25 Arpad Todor, "A Quantitative Approach on the Diffusion of Neoliberal Tax Policies in the Post Communist New-EU Member States," *European Journal of Science and Technology* 9, suppl. 2 (June 2013): 237–46. This article contains a comprehensive analysis of tax regimes.
- 26 By doing so, the Orbán cabinet disregarded the fact that Hungary had been an ally of Nazi Germany in World War II. Moreover, Hungarian authorities effectively helped Eichmann and his squad transport most Hungarian Jews to extermination camps.
- 27 See more details about these issues in chapter 8 of this book by András Tóth and István Grajczjár (on the extreme right) and chapter 6 by Angéla Kóczé (on Roma movements).
- 28 1 euro equals approximately 300 Hungarian forints.
- 29 The village where Orbán lives, Felcsút (near Budapest), has slightly more than 1,700 inhabitants. However, a small stadium has been constructed there to host 3,500 viewers at the village soccer team's home games.
- 30 Film producers dependent on the government have secured the "right to the final cut," which has institutionalized censorship in filmmaking yet again. It is no wonder that new Hungarian cinema follows Hollywood-type comedies and that no films touch on social problems.

- 31 András Bozóki, *Virtuális köztársaság* [Virtual republic] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2012), 256. The list includes pianist András Schiff; Nobel Laureate and writer Imre Kertész; conductors Ádám and Iván Fischer; filmmaker Béla Tarr; economist János Kornai; sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge; philosophers Ágnes Heller, Mihály Vajda, and Sándor Radnóti; and many others.
- 32 István Bibó, *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed. Károly Nagy, trans. András Boros-Kazai (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1991). István Bibó was a major democratic political thinker in Hungary in the period after World War II.
- 33 Imre Nagy was a reformist communist leader who served as prime minister during the 1956 revolution. He was executed by the Kádár regime in 1958.
- 34 Kim Lane Scheppele, "Hungary and the End of Politics," *Nation*, May 26, 2014.

Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitution*

*Miklós Bánkuti, Gábor Halmai, and
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In Hungary's April 2010 general elections, former prime minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party won an overwhelming majority of the seats in parliament. The elections gave voters a choice among the discredited Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which had governed for the preceding eight years; a new youth party of unclear aspirations, Politics Can Be Different (LMP); the neo-Nazi right (Jobbik); the center-right Fidesz; and a few smaller parties that did not muster enough votes to cross the 5 percent threshold into the unicameral, 386-seat Hungarian National Assembly.¹ Given that the bottom had fallen out of the economy on the MSZP's watch and that the party had been mired in scandal, it was not surprising that Fidesz won 53 percent of the popular vote. That was normal party politics. What happened next was a mistake of constitutional design.

During Hungary's transition away from communist rule in 1989 and 1990, the constitutional drafters had been worried about two things: a fractured parliament in which small parties would be unable to form stable majority coalitions, and a deeply entrenched constitution that would be too hard to change once the new democrats figured out how they wanted to design their political institutions. To allay the first of these worries, the framers opted for an election law that put its thumb on the scale in favor of larger parties—effectively using extra seat bonuses as a means of ensuring stable government. In order to address the second concern, the

* This chapter was previously published in the *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (2012): 138–146. For a book-length analysis of the topic, see: Gábor Attila Tóth, ed., *Constitution for a Disunited Nation. On Hungary's 2011 Fundamental Law* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2012).

amendment rule in the new constitution allowed a single two-thirds majority of parliament to alter any provision of the constitutional text.

What happened in April 2010 amounted to a perfect storm battering Hungarian constitutionalism. The disproportionate election law translated Fidesz's 53 percent vote share into 68 percent of the seats in parliament. And with the easy constitutional amendment rule, this two-thirds majority was big enough to change everything, which is what the ruling party set about doing. In its first year in office, the Fidesz government amended the old constitution 12 times, changing more than 50 separate provisions along the way. Many of these changes were designed to weaken institutions that might have checked what the government was going to do next, which was to impose upon Hungary a wholly new constitutional order using only ideas and votes from Fidesz.

One of the ruling party's first amendments removed the last restraint on a government with a two-thirds majority. In 1995, the constitution was changed to require a four-fifths vote of parliament to set the rules for writing a new constitution. But because the amendment rule to the constitution had not been altered to exempt the new four-fifths rule from its purview, the Fidesz parliament was able to use its two-thirds vote to eliminate the four-fifths rule from the constitution. With that rule out of the way, Fidesz could write a new constitution on its own.

Fidesz then attacked the Constitutional Court. For more than twenty years, the powerful court had been the constitutional guardian and primary check on the government.² It might well have declared many of Fidesz's initiatives unconstitutional had it not first been disabled.

The government wasted no time in changing the constitution to alter the system for nominating constitutional judges.³ The old constitution required a majority of parliamentary parties to agree to a nomination and then a two-thirds vote of parliament's members to elect the nominee to the court. The Fidesz parliament simply amended the constitution to allow the governing party to nominate candidates and let its two-thirds majority elect judges to the court. This gave Fidesz the power to name judges without needing multiparty backing.

The Fidesz government then restricted the Constitutional Court's jurisdiction. In order to plug gaping budget holes, the Fidesz government established a 98 percent retroactive tax on the customary departing bonuses of those who had left public employment in the preceding five years. The Constitutional Court, before it could be packed with a working majority of new judges, struck down this tax as unconstitutional.⁴ Parliament responded by amending the constitution to take away the court's power over fiscal matters.⁵

Now the court can no longer review for constitutionality any law about budgets or taxes unless it affect rights that are hard to infringe with budget measures (rights to life, dignity, data privacy, thought, conscience, religion, and citizenship). Conspicuously, the Constitutional Court is *not* allowed to review budget or tax laws if they infringe other rights that are much easier to limit with fiscal measures, such as the right to property, equality under the law, the prohibition against retroactive legislation, and the guarantee of fair judicial procedure. Sidelining the court in this area enabled the Fidesz government to continue to roll out a series of unconventional economic policies. Among other measures, it effectively nationalized private pensions, which resulted in 8,000 cases on the issue going to the European Court of Human Rights.⁶ Meanwhile, the Constitutional Court remained silent.

To further establish its control over the Constitutional Court, the Fidesz government amended the old constitution to increase the number of judges, giving the party power to name 7 of the 15 judges on the Court in its first year and a half in office. Although the Court still exists, it has now largely disappeared from the political landscape. All these measures enacted within the first year of the Fidesz government—the new nomination procedure for judges, the limitation on judicial review of fiscal measures, and the expanded size of the Constitutional Court—were entrenched in the new constitution.

Majoritarianism Unleashed

In its early days in power, Fidesz brought the National Election Commission (NVB) under its control as well, prematurely terminating the mandates of members who were elected to serve through 2014. Under the old system, the commission was divided so that five of its seats were filled by party delegates (one from each parliamentary party), while the other five were filled by mutual agreement between the governing and opposition parties. Fidesz immediately filled all the nondelegate seats on the commission with its own members, giving the ruling party a dominant majority on the commission. This mattered not only for election monitoring but also because the NVB must rule on proposals for referendums. Thus the commission could thwart attempts by civil society groups to use referendums to derail aspects of the government's program. (NVB decisions can be appealed to the Constitutional Court, but that hardly matters since the court, as we have seen, was disabled early on.) Another early target of the

Fidesz government was the mass media. Two major new laws restructured the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), the state regulatory agency, and created a five-member independent Media Council with powers to levy hefty fines on all media outlets for, among other things, failing to achieve “balanced” news coverage.⁷ Orbán appointed a former Fidesz MP to a nine-year term as head of the NMHH (a position whose occupant must by law now be the chairperson of the independent Media Council) and parliament elected other Fidesz loyalists to every seat on the council. These media reforms faced heavy criticism from both the Council of Europe and the EU, which forced Hungary to relax the rules slightly.⁸ But the key features of the new Media Council system were left in place—most crucially, the power to interpret vague standards vested in a council whose membership consists exclusively of affiliates of one party. As a result of a decision by the dying Constitutional Court in December 2011,⁹ these restrictive content requirements no longer apply to print and online media. But the media remain under pressure since the council still controls the entire broadcast sector and has not foresworn its still-extant legal power to reregulate print and online media. A May 2012 analysis from the Council of Europe confirms that the changes made by the Hungarian government still do not meet European human-rights standards.¹⁰

Finally, under the old constitution, the president held a number of important powers that could keep the government in check. The president could exercise a suspensive veto by sending laws back to parliament for revision or could send a law of questionable constitutionality to the Constitutional Court for review. Without changing the laws, the Fidesz government changed the person. In 2010, parliament elected former Fidesz vice-chairperson Pál Schmitt to the office. Schmitt never hesitated to sign anything that the Fidesz government put before him; thus he provided no real check on the constitutional revolution either. (Schmitt was forced to step down amid a plagiarism scandal in April 2012, and János Áder, a cofounder of Fidesz and coauthor of the controversial new election law, was elected to replace him.)

These four actions—limiting the Constitutional Court, dooming the referendum process, asserting control over the media, and putting a Fidesz loyalist in the presidency—effectively created an opening through which the Fidesz government could then push a new constitution without challenge.

The key parts of the constitution-drafting process occurred behind closed doors. The two-stage process required first that a parliamentary

committee adopt the basic principles of the new constitution and then that representatives draft the constitution following these principles. But when the parliamentary committee (which opposition members had boycotted because their proposals made little headway) announced the constitutional principles in December 2010, there was no debate or formal adoption of these principles. Instead, a March 2011 parliamentary resolution gave all MPs one week to come up with proposed draft constitutions “with or without” taking the principles into account.

In the end, only two proposals for a new constitution were offered. One came from an extraparlimentary committee consisting of three Fidesz members. Its head was József Szájer, a Fidesz member of the European Parliament. The other came from former National Assembly speaker and 2005 MSZP presidential candidate Katalin Szili. The Szájer draft was promptly introduced in parliament as a private member's bill. Using this procedure, Fidesz could eliminate the preparatory stage required for all government bills that mandates consultation with the opposition and interested civil society groups. As a result, virtually no one outside Fidesz was given the chance to discuss the draft constitution as it was being constructed. Szili's draft was quietly dropped by parliament and never received a serious hearing.

The Szájer constitution was introduced in the National Assembly with one month for a public debate that never occurred. Parliament itself discussed the constitution in only nine sessions, during which about 180 amendments were offered. But the only alterations that had any chance of passage were those submitted by Fidesz. The democratic opposition parties, whose proposals were virtually all rejected, eventually walked out of the chamber and did not vote on the final constitution. Only the far-right Jobbik stayed and voted no.

In a party-line vote, with all Fidesz members in favor and everyone else either boycotting or voting no, the new constitution was passed by parliament with the requisite two-thirds vote and was signed by the president on April 25, 2011. The whole process was completed in a rush without any contemplation of a public referendum to ratify the result. The new constitution went into effect on January 1, 2012,¹¹ along with many of the cardinal laws that the constitution required to fill in the specifics.

The New Constitutional Order

Both the old and the new constitution have at their core a parliamentary system with a unicameral parliament. But unicameral parliaments need checks if they are to avoid the potential abuses of majoritarianism. The old constitution had many checks. The new constitution has substantially weakened all of them.

The Constitutional Court had been the primary check on the power of government majorities, and we have already seen how Fidesz captured the court prior to the new constitution's adoption. But in addition to changing the size of the court, its jurisdiction, and the procedures for nominating its judges, the new constitution also sharply limits access to the court. Under the old constitution, *anyone* could challenge a law's constitutionality. This *actio popularis* jurisdiction was unusual in Europe and had become the most effective way in Hungary to keep the government in constitutional line.

The new constitution eliminates *actio popularis* review, substituting instead a constitutional complaint on the German model. In this new system, individuals may challenge laws only if the laws affect them personally. The ability of the court to review laws in the abstract is further limited by the narrow list of officials who have competence under the constitution to take a case to the court for abstract review. For example, the constitution requires 25 percent of the MPs to challenge a law. But given the current division of the opposition between the left (the MSZP) and the far right (Jobbik), it is unlikely that 25 percent of MPs will work together to organize such a challenge. The cumulative effect is that the court will now hear primarily individual-level complaints alleging infringements of rights, but will not be able to reach many of the most disturbing aspects of the new constitutional order—issues related to separation of powers and institutional structure.

Other checking institutions that were important in the old constitutional order have also been seriously weakened. The ordinary judiciary has lost a great deal of its independence. Under the old system, lower-court judges were selected by panels of their fellow judges. Under the new system, the president of the newly created National Judicial Office (KIH) has the power to select new judges, to promote or demote any judge, to begin disciplinary proceedings, and to select the leaders of each of the courts.¹² The person chosen by parliament with a two-thirds majority to fill this office is both a close friend of Prime Minister Orbán and the wife of József Szájer, the principal drafter of the new constitution.¹³

In choosing new judges, the head of the KIH must pick candidates from a list prepared by local councils of judges, but she sets up the process through which candidates may apply, and she may reject the judges' lists and start the process over again if need be. Hungary's president must sign off on all new judicial appointments, but with a Fidesz loyalist holding that position, the president is unlikely to object.

The Transitional Provisions to the Fundamental Law, enacted by parliament on December 30, 2011, give the president of the KIH the power to reassign specific cases from the courts where they are assigned by law to any other court in the country. In the first set of reassignments, made in February 2012, two of the nine cases moved to other courts had distinct political overtones, including the highest-profile corruption case that the public prosecutor has so far brought against MSZP officials as well as an appeal by a Fidesz party member from a criminal conviction for corruption.¹⁴

Between selecting the judges and being able to assign cases, the head of the KIH has extraordinary power. Moreover, when her nine-year term expires, she can be replaced only by a candidate who can muster a two-thirds vote of parliament. Should parliament be unable to agree on her successor, she may stay on until a new candidate wins the required legislative supermajority. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission (formally the European Commission for Democracy through Law) recently condemned the new law on the judiciary for concentrating unheard-of powers in the hands of one person and for the extraordinarily long term of her office, among other issues.¹⁵

The new president of the KIH has had many judgeships to fill in her first months in office. Between lifting a moratorium that had blocked the selection of new judges until the new system could be set up and abruptly lowering the judicial retirement age from 70 to 62, the government had about 10 percent of all judicial posts in the country to fill when the new constitution took effect. The EU has brought an infringement action against Hungary for violating EU law by arbitrarily lowering the judicial retirement age. In the meantime, the newly opened judgeships are being filled quickly while the infringement procedure is pending.

Entrenching Fidesz

In addition to weakening the separation of powers and attacking judicial independence, the Fidesz government has also compromised accountability institutions that were once known for their independence and expertise.

The old ombudsman system for monitoring human rights has been seriously weakened. In place of four separate ombudsmen with separate staffs and independent jurisdictions, the new system has only one parliamentary commissioner for fundamental rights with two deputies operating under his direction and a much-reduced staff. The old data protection commissioner's office has been eliminated, and its functions have been transferred to a new office that is part of the government and no longer an independent body. The EU has brought an infringement action against Hungary for violating EU law with this change in the status of the data protection authority.

In the new constitutional order, the state audit office, once a bastion of independent expertise, has been granted additional powers to launch serious investigations into the misuse of public funds. But the new head of the state audit office, a former Fidesz MP who was elected to hold the audit post for 12 years by a two-thirds vote of parliament, has no professional auditing experience. The prosecutor general, elected by a two-thirds parliamentary majority for nine years, also has increased powers—for example, to assign any criminal case to any court of his choosing. Not surprisingly, the occupant of this office, too, has long been closely aligned with Fidesz. The long terms of the current head of the state audit office and the current prosecutor general mean that both will survive through multiple parliamentary election cycles, providing crucial veto points should any other party come to power in the meantime.

The new constitution also establishes a Budget Council with the power to veto any budget produced by parliament that adds even a single forint to the national debt. The Budget Council consists of three officials, two elected by a two-thirds vote of parliament and one appointed by the president. All have terms of office that exceed a normal parliamentary cycle—6 years for 2 of the members and 12 for the other. Thus this institution can exercise dead-hand control over future elected governments.

According to the new constitution, if parliament fails to agree on a budget by March 31 of each year, then the president may dissolve parliament and call new elections. Obviously, if the Budget Council, dominated by Fidesz loyalists, vetoes the budget on the eve of the deadline, the constitutional trigger may be pulled for new elections. If another party manages to gain power in a future election, this provision will hang like the Sword of Damocles over its continued term in office.

There are numerous other troubling aspects of this new constitutional order: the gerrymandering of electoral districts, which makes it hard for any other party to win an election in the foreseeable future; the removal of

the statute of limitations for crimes committed during the Soviet period, which opens the door to selective prosecution of the political opposition; an unwisely large number of cardinal laws (i.e., laws requiring a two-thirds vote in parliament) that fix details of state policy on issues such as taxes, pensions, and family protection; the troubling constitutional preamble, which gives constituent power to ethnic Hungarians both at home and abroad while leaving out all other citizens; the references to the historic constitution, which invite (among other things) revisiting the 1920 Treaty of Trianon (which set Hungary's borders after the Austro-Hungarian Empire was defeated in World War I); the sudden deregistration of more than 300 churches that had operated in Hungary for years; and incursions on the independence of the Hungarian National Bank. We have focused on the core structural issues, however, because they reveal why it will be hard for any non-Fidesz government to govern, should such a government manage to be elected.

Assuming that there continue to be free and fair elections among competing parties in the future, it will be hard for any other party to come to power with this level of political control over all the institutions necessary for democratic elections. Even if another party defies the odds and manages to win an election, however, Fidesz loyalists are entrenched in every corner of the state—from the Constitutional Court, the Budget Council, and the KIH to the State Audit Office, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and the Hungarian National Bank. These loyalists ensure that there will be multiple choke points at which Fidesz can stop anything that deviates from its preferences.

In a September 2009 speech, Viktor Orbán predicted that there was a “real chance that politics in Hungary will no longer be defined by a dualist power space... Instead, a large governing party will emerge in the center of the political stage [that] will be able formulate national policy, not through constant debates but through a natural representation of interests.” Orbán's vision for a new constitutional order—one in which his political party occupies the center stage of Hungarian political life and puts an end to debates over values—has now been entrenched in law. The new constitutional order was built with the votes of his political bloc alone, and it aims to keep the opposition at bay for a long time. Constitutions, though, often have a way of turning against their makers, as the new rules of the game are learned and used by those who were initially disadvantaged by them. Whether Orbán can keep his opponents down forever, then, remains to be seen.

Notes and references

- 1 Among these parties were the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the winner of the 1990 elections, and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the most successful of the liberal parties since the transition. By 2010, both were near complete collapse.
- 2 Gábor Halmai, "The Hungarian Approach to Constitutional Review," in *Constitutional Justice, East and West: Democratic Legitimacy and Constitutional Courts in Post-Communist Europe in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Wojciech Sadurski (The Hague: Kluwer International, 2002), 189–211.
- 3 Amendment to Act XX of 1949 on The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary
- 4 Constitutional Court, Decision 184/2010. (X. 28).
- 5 Act CXIX of 2010 on the amendment to Act XX of 1949 on the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary.
- 6 "Human Rights Court Inundated with Hungary Complaints," EurActive website, January 16, 2012, <http://www.euractiv.com/future-eu/human-rights-court-inundated-hun-news-510155> (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 7 Act CIV of 2010 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content and Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Media, translated at Center for Media, Data and Society, Central European University website, <https://cmcs.ceu.hu/node/26249> (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 8 Center for Media and Communication Studies, *Hungarian Media Laws in Europe: An Assessment of the Consistency of Hungary's Media Laws with European Practices and Norms* (Budapest: Central European University, 2012), <http://www.cmcs.ceu.hu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/274/hungarianmedialawsineurope0.pdf> (accessed June 21, 2014). The criticism of the new media laws is collected at the website of the Center for the Study of the Media at the Central European University at <https://cmcs.ceu.hu/node/26249> (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 9 Constitutional Court, Decision 165/2011. (XII. 20).
- 10 Joan Barata Mir and Eve Salomon, *Expertise by Council of Europe Experts on Hungarian Media Legislation: Act CIV of 2010 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules on Media Content and Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Media*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2012), <http://mediamonitor.ceu.hu/archive/archive-item/?id=143>.
- 11 The new Hungarian Fundamental Law is available in translation at <http://lapa.princeton.edu/hosteddocs/hungary/Hungarian%20Constitution%20English%20final%20version.pdf> (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 12 Paul Krugman, "First Let's Pick All the Judges," *Conscience of a Liberal* (New York Times blog), repost of Kim Lane Scheppele's piece of the same title, March 10, 2012, <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/10/first-lets-pick-all-the-judges>. This article contains more detail on the state of the judiciary under the new law.
- 13 Joshua Rozenberg, "Meet Tünde Handó," *Guardian*, March 20, 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/law/2012/mar/20/tunde-hando-hungarian-judges (accessed June 21, 2014).
- 14 Scheppele in Krugman, "Pick All the Judges."
- 15 European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), *Opinion on Act CLXII of 2011 on the Legal Status and Remuneration of Judges and Act CLXI of 2011 on the Organisation and Administration of Courts of Hungary*, March 19, 2012, available at www.venice.coe.int/docs/2012/CDL%282012%29104-e.pdf (accessed June 21, 2014).

Enhancing the Effectiveness of Basic Rights Protection in the Ombudsman's Activity: Toward a European Type of Ombudsman System

Máté Szabó

Constitutional Court Proceedings and the Ombudsman's Activity: The First Steps of the Practice on the Basis of the Regulation of the Fundamental Law*

In contemporary Hungary, it is the commissioner for fundamental rights (ombudsman), not the citizen, who knocks on the door of the Constitutional Court. As of January 1, 2012, not every citizen has the *actio popularis*¹ at his or her disposal for initiating the abstract *ex post* review of norms, which was until that date a distinct Hungarianism, existing only in Hungary. Nor is it part of the ombudsman's task to translate general political criticisms into the language of the Constitutional Court.

The Fundamental Law gives those political forces having one quarter of the mandates the opportunity to initiate the proceeding of *ex post* review of norms in the Constitutional Court. This has not led to a cooperative oppositional petition during the period of concern to this chapter. This opportunity may arise with a changing parliamentary composition in which the comprehensive critical attitude of the opposition is manifested

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in petitions submitted. Compared to this, the ombudsman, within his or her competence, focuses on partial questions, single issues. Such petitions do not challenge the legal institutions but rather address partial aspects (e.g., the types of pension, but not the whole of the pension system; certain anomalies in the education system, but not the foundations of the education system).

The Previous Ombudsmen's Petitions

In February 2012, upon the request of the Constitutional Court, the ombudsman, as parliamentary commissioner for fundamental rights with a reference to the Fundamental Law, *maintained* all petitions submitted before January 1, 2012.

The office of the ombudsman maintained the ongoing petitions of the parliamentary commissioner for future generations regarding site authorization rules² and the regulation of noise emission levels for cultural festivals.³ In addition, the Dunakeszi Marsh and the Páty golf course project⁴ were partially maintained and complemented.

The ombudsman submitted in his own name the petitions submitted before January 1, 2012 by the data protection commissioner and that had not been heard by the Constitutional Court until that time (with two exceptions), since Hungary's National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information was not entitled to turn to the Constitutional Court.⁵

The Constitutional Court only partially heard these previously maintained petitions by the time the present manuscript was completed. Some of these were rejected;⁶ some had become devoid of purpose.⁷ The Constitutional Court rejected the ombudsman's petition requesting the annulment of the provisions of the decree of the local Józsefváros⁸ government on punishing scavenging⁹ because the representative body repealed the legislation in compliance with the new law on misdemeanors.¹⁰

It can be clearly established from the above that some of these petitions appear to be new cases. However, in many cases this meant the confirmation of petitions dating back three to four years, petitions that were therefore those of previous ombudsmen. Since 2007, the parliamentary commissioner for fundamental rights—depending on the results of the examinations conducted—turned to the Constitutional Court three to five times. In the first nine months of the year, the ombudsman turned only twice to the Constitutional Court *ex officio* for *ex post* review of norms on the basis of the previous ombudsman's competence to submit a petition:

first the provisions of the law on misdemeanors allowing the detainment of minors was challenged;¹¹ then the annulment of the provisions on child-care allowance was requested.¹² In both cases, a number of proposals for legislation were put forward.

Petitions Based on Citizens' Initiatives

By June 1, 2013, nearly 800 petitions were received by the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in which the petitioners put forward constitutional objections partially or entirely against legislation. On the one hand, these are outnumbered by the abstract review of norms petitions under *actio popularis* submitted to the Constitutional Court. On the other hand, the petitions submitted had considerably similar content or were of a similar nature (e.g., on various pension rules or the insulin supply), and approximately one-third of the letters were the same mass petitions and/or additions to them criticizing the rules of the election of the president and the members of the Media Council (based on a form letter available on the Internet and easily forwarded).

The ombudsman used his power to submit petitions upon public initiative 27 times in the first 18 months on a variety of issues. Only the petitions that were the most significant to citizens' rights and obligations will be presented here.

1. Transitional Provisions or not?

The first such petition we will discuss initiated the annulment of the Transitional Provisions of the Fundamental Law in whole or in part. According to this petition, the Transitional Provisions had not become part of the Fundamental Law in spite of its peculiar self-definition, as a consequence of which the Constitutional Court may examine them. The principles of rule of law and legal certainty are violated by the uncertain status of the Transitional Provisions. If the Constitutional Court interpreted the Transitional Provisions as an amendment to the Fundamental Law, then they should be declared ineffective in matters of public law, since the Transitional Provisions were accepted contrary to Article S of the Fundamental Law. While Subsection (3) of the Closing Provisions of the Fundamental Law grants authorization to adopt the Transitional Provisions related to the Fundamental Law, the word *transition* is used in a different context in the first part of the Transitional Provisions (the part entitled "Transition

from Communist Dictatorship to Democracy”). In contrast, the second part of the Transitional Provisions, entitled “Transitional Provisions Related to the Entry into Force of the Fundamental Law” contains rules of a nontransitional nature as well (designation of a court other than the courts of general competence, cardinal Acts on churches and nationalities, provisions on constitutional complaints, the right of government offices to apply to a court, the organization of the Hungarian National Bank, the Fundamental Law Day). A secondary purpose of the petition was to annul these nontransitional provisions.¹³

In its Decision 45/2012. (XII. 29.), the Constitutional Court found the ombudsman’s petition to be well founded. The Court pointed out that parliament overstepped its constitutional authority when it implemented regulations to the Transitional Provisions having no transitional character. The formal rules for legislation are also binding for the constituent power. Therefore, the Constitutional Court annulled the regulations challenged by the ombudsman.

2. Limitation of free legal aid for poor?

Another case saw the challenge of Act LXXX of 2003 on Legal Aid (the “Legal Aid Act”), which excluded from free legal assistance those who initiated and participated in procedures at the Constitutional Court. For socioeconomically disadvantaged people, this means the violation of their right to remedy. This discriminates against those who are unable to bear the legal expenses based on their financial situation. The only legal remedy these people have at their disposal is the constitutional complaint. In this respect, the state fails to meet its obligations of objective protection of fundamental rights and that of ensuring equal access to the procedure and equal opportunities.¹⁴

On petition, the Constitutional Court held it unconstitutional and annulled that provision of the Legal Aid Act that excluded people from socially deprived backgrounds from being able to use free legal assistance needed to effectively enforce their rights in the course of constitutional complaint proceedings.¹⁵

3. Unfair contract conditions with students?

In another petition related to the government decree regulating student contracts, the ombudsman initiated the annulment of some sections¹⁶ of Act CCIV of 2011 on Higher Education (the “Higher Education Act”) and

Government Decree 2/2012 (I. 20.) on Student Contracts to be Concluded with the Beneficiaries of Full and Partial Hungarian State Scholarships (the “Decree”) which prohibits students from leaving the country for employment. The ombudsman suggested that the Constitutional Court should suspend the Decree’s entry into force pending the Court’s review of the submitted petition. Within and outside the scope of the Higher Education Act, the Decree establishes the rules governing student contracts, together with the rights, obligations, and legal consequences of possible noncompliance. Students are obligated to obtain their degree within an acceptable period of time and, within 20 years of having obtained the degree, to establish, maintain, and continue employment in Hungary for a period twice the length of their studies under full or partial state scholarship. If they fail to do so, the former students are required to reimburse the full or partial amount of the stipend. This is a restriction of graduates’ right to self-determination and their right to freely choose their work and profession. The right to work is also violated, since most students seek employment contracts rather than volunteer work. The decree-level regulation of this issue is incompatible with the Fundamental Law, as state support for higher-level studies should be regulated in an act. The restriction of rights stipulated by the student contract may not qualify as an indispensable or even appropriate instrument for the domestic employment of graduates, nor is it proportional.

The Constitutional Court did not review the contents of the government decree, but in Decision 32/2012. (VII. 4.) CC the Court stated that both the provisions of the government decree regulating student contracts and the authorization by the Higher Education Act¹⁷ are formally incompatible with the Fundamental Law. In this decision, the Court did not examine the merits of the challenged regulations. Consequently, parliament amended the Higher Education Act by incorporating the earlier decree-level regulations into it, so the ombudsman objected to these new regulations of the Higher Education Act as well.¹⁸

4. Undue restrictions on the exercise of minority rights?

The ombudsman submitted a petition for the annulment of certain regulations of Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities (the “Nationality Rights Act”) in the context of an *ex post* review of norms and the establishment of incompatibility of some of its regulations with an international treaty. This provision places an arbitrary constraint on minority groups for participation in minority elections, allowing only public benefit

organizations to stand as candidates in this procedure. In violation of the Fundamental Law, the Nationality Rights Act restricts the right of national minorities to form their local and national self-governments, and it wrongfully discriminates against organizations of national minorities,¹⁹ thus violating the requirement of equal treatment.

5. Breaching the rules of conflict of interests?

On the basis of nearly 150 petitions of identical content, I requested the annulment of certain regulations of Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Media (the “Media Act”). According to the ombudsman’s petition, the rules governing the election of the Media Council are in breach of the Fundamental Law, not only because the chairperson of the Media Council is simultaneously the director of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), but because the functions are interwoven as well, which goes against the rules concerning conflict of interests. Furthermore, several provisions of the Media Act regulating the election, legal status, and termination of the chairperson of the Media Council together are uninterpretable and inapplicable. This may result in a breach of the requirement of legal certainty derived from the rule of law, undermining the proper functioning of the Media Council, and subsequently leading to the infringement of the obligation of objective institutional defense when it comes to freedom of expression. After the submission of the petition, parliament amended the Media Act.²⁰

In the petition to annul some sections²¹ of Act CCXI of 2011 on the Protection of Families (the “Family Protection Act”) and the suspension of its entry into force, the ombudsman drew attention to the fact that the concept of family based on marriage between man and woman, as set out in the Family Protection Act, constitutes discrimination on the basis of a different aspect, sexual orientation, in connection with the rights to private and family life and to human dignity, and unnecessarily and disproportionately restricts these rights of those living in some form of partnership other than marriage. In Decision 31/2012. (VI. 29.) CC, the Constitutional Court, as a new measure stipulated by the recent Act CLI of 2011 on the Constitutional Court, suspended the entry into force of Section 8 of the Family Protection Act scheduled for July 1, 2012.²² Later on, the pertaining regulations were annulled in Decision 43/2012. (XII. 20.) CC. The Constitutional Court held that no direct or indirect discrimination was allowed among children irrespective of whether their parents lived in marriage or some other kind of partnership. The Court also pointed out that

the regulations of the legislation governing succession were so incompatible with the Civil Code that the situation infringed legal certainty.

6. Breaching the principles of fair procedure?

Finally, the right to fair procedure and the right to legal remedy are infringed when parliament adopts a decision on the recognition of an association conducting religious activities, such as a church. Since the act does not define the criteria of deliberation, the parliament is not obligated to justify its decision to reject a given association, and there is no legal remedy against such a decision. This is the reason why the ombudsman initiated the establishment of the violation of the Fundamental Law and the annulment of certain provisions of Act CCVI of 2011 on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion and on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Denominations and Religious Communities. Furthermore, the fact that parliament assumed the right to decide in a matter that is foreign to the political character of the supreme representative body violates the principle of separation of powers.²³

Conclusion

The institution of the ombudsman in Hungary has become more efficient and more European, and the results at hand confirm the direction of those changes. The active, sometimes even hyperactive functioning of the ombudsman and other internal correction mechanisms is not intended to curtail off Hungarian democracy from external, international correction mechanisms in search of its own ways. These actions offer solutions that are quicker, closer to the problem itself, and more efficient; they also serve to curtail the too frequent activities of various international forums trying to chip away at the legitimacy of the Hungarian constitutional system. However, it must be remembered that Hungary is a new democracy searching for its own way, trying to find its own equilibrium.

Between 1990 and 2011, Hungary changed the least among the new democracies; it did not even have a new constitution. The years from 2010 to 2011 have brought about a radical change: extremely quick and substantial changes have been introduced, such that internal mechanisms of finding equilibrium have become more important than ever before. The Fundamental Law has played a central role in all of this: new functions have been introduced and strengthened (as in the case of the ombudsman),

elected tenure in office has been extended, and the number of members has been increased (the number Constitutional Court justices has gone from 11 to 15).

What effect will all this have on the new parliament, consisting of fewer members but complemented by the representatives of ethnic minorities, that was elected in 2014 with the participation of significant number of Hungarian citizens living abroad? As far as the ombudsman is concerned, we think it will be even more appreciative of the role played by the commissioner for fundamental rights as an institution assisting parliament and controlling the government and the public administration. We contend that decision makers should pay more attention than before to the messages of a more vocal ombudsman in their search for equilibrium. The ombudsman must avoid being stuck in an ivory tower and must strengthen cooperation with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).²⁴ These actors involved will be formed by the new rules, and they will form the roles they will play, adjusting to, and hopefully advancing, the expectations and wishes of the public.

Notes and references

- 1 *Actio popularis* is a Latin term that means a lawsuit brought by a third party in the interest of the public as a whole.
- 2 Government Decree 358/2008. (XII. 31.) regarding the site authorization procedure and rules of notification. What is distinct in this case is that according to its file number, 3255/2012. (IX. 28.) CC, it is a ruling; however, the operative part makes it clear that it was passed as a decision by the acting council.
- 3 The value limits of noise pollution deriving from certain activities with regards to protected areas are regulated by Appendix Nos. 1 and 2 of KvVM-EüM Joint Ministerial Decree 27/2008 (XII. 3.).
- 4 Since the commissioner for future generations referred to the collision of the rejected local government decrees with other legal rules as well, and since the Constitutional Court has no competence to judge it pursuant to the new legislation on the Constitutional Court, I wrote a letter to the government office to request it to examine whether the local government decrees affected by the petitions and the resolutions (construction procedure) were in compliance with the higher-level legislation.
- 5 <http://ajbh.hu/allam/aktualis/htm/kozlemeny20120423.htm> (accessed August 17, 2014).
- 6 Such as the petition requesting the annulment of Section 3, Subsection (2) of Act VII of 1989 on Strikes, which was rejected by the Constitutional Court with its Decision 30/2012. (VI. 27.) CC; the petition regarding Section 6, Subsection (1) of Act XLVII of 2009 on the Criminal Records System was also dismissed.
- 7 The Constitutional Court rejected the petitions regarding the Páty and Dunakeszi local government decrees on the grounds that it examines their compliance with the

Fundamental Law, only if the subject of the examination is exclusively to establish the local government decree's compliance with the Fundamental Law without the examination of its collision with other legislation. Compliance with the Fundamental Law of the decrees and the normative resolutions challenged in the petitions can be heard only together with their collision with other legislation, for which the ombudsman also turned to the competent government office seeking remedy for the infringement.

8 District VIII of Budapest.

9 According to the local government's provision, homeless people who make their living from rummaging through garbage were to be punished by fine and were incarcerated if they failed to pay.

10 Apart from these, the Constitutional Court rejected the petition of the parliamentary commissioner for future generations regarding the partial annulment of Act CXI of 2011 on the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (Decision 3002/2012. [VI. 21.] CC), and the previous data protection commissioner's petition for the establishment of the unconstitutionality and the annulment of the specified text of the Section 17, Subsection (2) of Act XLIII of 2010 on the Central State Administrative Bodies and on the Legal Status of Government Members and Secretaries of State and the specified text of clause 83 of the government resolution on the rules of government procedure (1144/2010. [VII. 7.]).

11 AJB-3298/2012 (precedent: AJB-5980/2010).

12 AJB-1041/2012 (precedent: AJB-2293/2011).

13 AJB-2302/2012.

14 AJB-1961/2012.

15 Decision 42/2012. (XII. 20.) CC.

16 Including Section 110, Subsection (1), item 23.

17 Through deleting the expression "on terms defined by the Government" from Section 39, Subsection (3) of the Higher Education Act.

18 AJB-2834/2012.

19 AJB-2709/2012.

20 AJB-3299/2012.

21 Sections 7 and 8.

22 AJB-3299/2012.

23 AJB-2303/2012.

24 On October 1, 2012, the post of Coordinator for Civil Affairs was created in the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights; this post was filled by Ms. Timea Csikós, legal officer, whose main task is to maintain contact with NGOs and document the results of this interaction.

Party Colonization of the Media: The Case of Hungary*

Péter Bajomi-Lázár

Media scholars looking into the relationship between political and media systems in the former communist countries have mainly worked on the assumption that parties seek control over the media in order to suppress critical voices and to gain favorable coverage so that they can influence voting behavior, but they have barely explored political actors' other possible motivations. Meanwhile, political scientists studying the region's countries have often focused on parties' relationship to the state and the resources that they extracted from state institutions such as ministries and municipalities, but largely ignored the relationship between parties and the media. In this chapter, originally written as part of the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe project, I attempt to link these two traditions. Introducing the concept of party colonization of the media, it looks into what benefits other than suppressing criticism and gaining favorable coverage parties may gain from controlling the media. It uses the example of Hungary to illustrate how party colonization of the media works. It also intends to assess how different patterns of media colonization affect media freedom.

Media Freedom in the East and the West

In April 2010, the Hungarian Wireless Agency reports, a delegation of Hungary's media authority at the time paid a visit to the People's Repub-

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lic of China. The representatives of the authority met with Zhang Haitao, Deputy Minister of the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, and requested a detailed documentation of China's media policy. The head of the Hungarian delegation, Tamás Tirts, nominated by the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) to the authority, told the news agency that Hungary needed new broadcasting regulations and a new media system.¹

Later in April 2010, Hungary held elections that brought the conservative Fidesz party and its KDNP ally over two-thirds of seats in parliament. During the next few months, the new parliament passed a regulation that established a National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) to supervise, in addition to private radio and television, print media and the Internet. The new regulation also created a Public Service Foundation to manage the public institutions: Hungarian Television (MTV), Hungarian Radio (MR), Danube Television (Duna TV), and the Hungarian News Agency (MTI). The NMHH is headed by a Media Council, chaired by the late Annamária Szalai, herself directly appointed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. All four members of the Media Council have been nominated and elected by Fidesz. In the new structure, Annamária Szalai had unprecedented powers to supervise both the private and the public media.

Hungary's new media regulations generated international concern and were criticized by the European Federation of Journalists, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the International Press Institute, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) representative on media freedom, and Reporters Without Borders, among others. The European Commission recommended amendments to the law. By the next year, Hungary's press freedom index fell seven points on a 100-point scale according to Freedom House's annual assessment; having been listed solidly in the "free press" category for over a decade, the country fell just one point short of the "partly free press" category in 2010.² Reporters Without Borders also downgraded Hungary.³ The establishment of media freedom was a major project of the democratic opposition during the political transformations of 1989–1991 in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the young Fidesz party in Hungary. Few would have expected such a drastic return to what some analysts describe as an authoritarian media policy.⁴

To be sure, Hungary is not the only country in Central and Eastern Europe where media freedom has been a recurring issue.⁵ Media freedom was formally declared during the last political transformation, but it failed

to materialize in many of the region's countries.⁶ Freedom House's historical press freedom indexes in the period 1993–2010 suggest that the status of media freedom was poorer in the majority of the EU's eastern member states than in the majority of the western ones. The organization uses criteria regarding the media's legal, political, and economic environment; of a total of 23 questions it asks, 20 are related to political pressures.⁷ Given the nature of the assessment criteria, this implies that the media were exposed to more political pressure in the EU's new democracies than in its old ones (see Figure 4.1.).

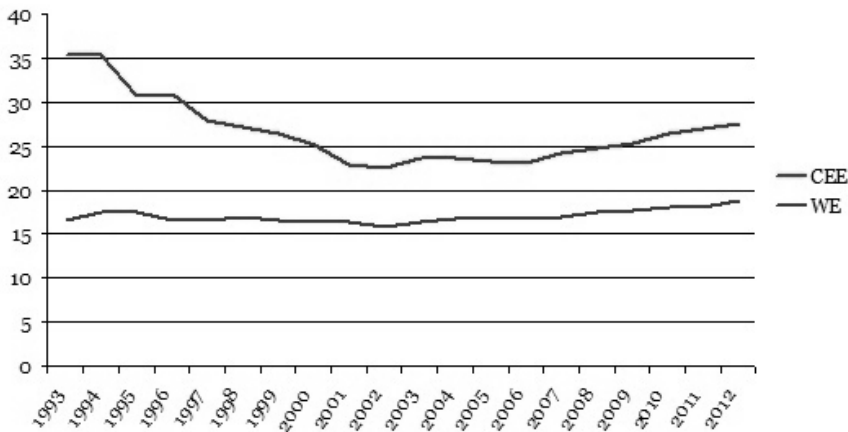


Figure 4.1. Freedom House press freedom average rankings, Central and Eastern Europe vs. Western Europe (without Cyprus and Malta), 1993–2010. Note: The higher the score, the less freedom the media have.

Of all media, public service broadcasters seem particularly susceptible to political pressures. A study focusing on public television in 20 European countries and conducted by the Open Society Institute (OSI) – Budapest in 2005 suggests that public service media were highly vulnerable, because buffer institutions failed to protect their professional autonomy and political independence from political pressures.⁸ As Dragomir and Thompson note in a follow-up study by the same organization in 2008 in nine European countries, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia,

the political elites in many of the new democracies are determined to keep control of PSB. In the early 2000s, when their countries had recently joined the Council of

Europe and in many cases were pursuing accession to the European Union, these elites showed signs of willingness to refrain from influencing these media. Today, by contrast, they openly strive to restore and maintain tight control, usually by appointing loyal people to governing bodies... [In Poland,] members of TVP's Supervisory Board continue to be drawn from party ranks and lack professional expertise. They have included the owner of a local hippodrome, a close associate of the mayor of Warsaw, a retired lawyer and a purveyor of herbal remedies to the former Prime Minister's mother... [The] Romanian SRTV ... continues to be selected on the same old mechanism that keeps the institution in political harness... [In Slovakia,] the governing coalition interfered grossly in both the appointment of the STV Director-General and the appointment of its governing structures.⁹

When explaining the recurring deficit of media freedom in many of the former communist countries, most analysts implicitly or explicitly rely on the assumption that political actors seek control over the media in order to suppress critical voices and to gain favorable coverage—that is, to exert censorship and propaganda—in order to influence public opinion and voting behavior. But this assumption has not yet been tested empirically. In this chapter, I look into whether evidence supports this recurring claim and, introducing the concept of party colonization of the media, explore what benefits other than suppressing criticism and gaining favorable coverage parties may gain from controlling the media. I use the example of Hungary to illustrate how party colonization of the media works. I also intend to assess how different patterns of media colonization affect media freedom.

Theories of Media Capture

Several authors use the concept of *media capture* to describe informal pressures on the media in the former communist countries. While the concept has no universally agreed-upon definition, most authors seem to agree that the benefit of media capture is the media's influence on public opinion and voting behavior, i.e., the capturers' ability to articulate their views and to assert their ideologies, whether they be political parties or related business interest groups that exert pressure on the media. Corneo, for example, argues that the "media can influence voting outcomes" and, by capturing media, "the rich can influence information published in a media outlet at a cost."¹⁰ Petrova suggests that "mass media, being the most important source of information on public affairs for the general public, provides a convenient means for manipulating public opinion."¹¹ Besley and Prat note that the point in media capture is that the media "af-

fects the voters' information and hence their voting decisions."¹² Mungiu-Pippidi describes media capture as "a situation in which the media has not succeeded in becoming autonomous to manifest a will of its own and to exercise its main function, notably of informing people, but has persisted in an intermediate state, whereas various groups, not just the government, use it for other purposes," but she does not specify what other purposes media capture may serve.¹³

Empirical evidence, however, does not seem to be consistent with the general view that the media can efficiently shape public opinion and voting behavior. Media effects research and reception studies suggest that the media's influence has been largely overstated, especially because personal experiences and interpersonal communication overwrite the messages transmitted by the media. In a pluralistic media environment, people tend to listen selectively only to those outlets that reinforce their predispositions.¹⁴ Some findings even assert that progovernment propaganda may actually have a boomerang effect in that it can alienate, rather than mobilize, the incumbent parties' supporters.¹⁵ Common knowledge confirms this line of argument: communism fell despite the party states' extensive control over the media in many of the late communist countries. It also is noteworthy that electoral volatility is high and that cabinets change frequently in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe,¹⁶ which suggests that parties' recurring capture of and influence over the media do not guarantee electoral victory.

Further, because of the recent rise of commercial broadcasters, online news portals, and social media, patterns of media use have changed. The reach and audience share of public service television, the most frequent target of the political elite, has shrunk over the past two decades, and the once undisputed hegemons of the air are now watched by less than 30 or 20 percent, and in some countries 10 percent, of the population, the only exception to this rule in Central and Eastern Europe being Poland, where public television still has a major audience share.¹⁷ It would simply be irrational for politicians to expect that public broadcasters with such a limited reach could have a huge impact on voters in pluralistic media landscapes, where audiences are exposed to a variety of messages.

Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, a European Research Council project based at Oxford University, examined how political systems affect media systems, and asks what kind of democracy is needed for the media to perform their agreed-upon normative functions.¹⁸ In 2010 and 2011, the project team conducted some 300 interviews with media professionals, politicians, political communicators, and social sci-

entists in the 10 former communist countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007.¹⁹ The interviews with senior representatives of 35 parties in 10 countries have indeed revealed that some of the political elite had doubts about the media's ability to influence public opinion and voting behavior. When asked about this, several of them noted that the media's role may be overstated, and the media's actual impact may be lesser than the political (and journalistic) elite think.

For example, a representative of the Czech Social Democratic Party was of the opinion that "the relationship between the press and people's behavior is often unpredictable." In Hungary, a senior member of the Politics Can Be Different (LMP) party observed that "the past 20 years are evidence that those who submit public service media to tight government control will lose the next elections," and a former senior leader of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) noted that "media capture didn't work." A leading politician of the Polish Peasants' Party suggested that "there is more proof that those who control the media are more likely to lose the elections than win them." An interviewee representing the Democratic Liberal Party of Romania said that "my party, like any political party, overestimates the role of the media," and added that President Băscescu had won the elections in a hostile media environment. A representative of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union noted that "the media don't have as much an influence as they like to think." Another interviewee, speaking for the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, observed that "if anybody wants to control the public service media, it is rather counterproductive... The voter is not stupid." In Slovenia, a senior politician speaking for the Social Democrats suggested that "excessive media control eventually backfires," and one from the Slovenian People's Party said that media capture "never pays off," as the public easily recognizes media bias. To be sure, other interviews conducted during the research revealed that other politicians still maintained the view that the media were an efficient tool to influence public opinion and voting behavior. Yet the findings above warn that the monocausal view explaining media capture with the media's alleged influence and underlying most of the literature may not offer the full picture.

It should also be noted that nearly all of the parties whose representatives were interviewed commission public opinion surveys. Some parties also pretest messages via focus group research before releasing them. One party, notably the Labor Party in Lithuania, has been established on the basis of preliminary market research. This trend suggests that parties' communication today is designed in such a way that they try to meet the

demands of either the general public or their very own constituencies, i.e., to tell people what people want to hear. Put differently, most parties try to follow, rather than lead, public opinion—which is another reason why one should seek additional motives behind parties' efforts to control the media. The concept of party colonization of the media, to be elaborated in the next section, attempts to account for these motives.

Party Colonization of the Media

Comparative studies of party systems show that political parties in the new democracies of the EU are less embedded in society and hence less stable than those in the old ones. The data provided by Mair and van Biezen for the period 1997–2000, though not covering all EU member states, show that, on average, 2.84 percent of the electorate assumed membership in a political party in the new democracies as opposed to 4.40 percent in the old ones. And while certain older democracies had lower per capita participation (e.g., 1.92 percent in the United Kingdom and 1.57 percent in France), absolute numbers of party membership were still much higher than those of any eastern country.²⁰ The survey data collected in 2006 by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance reveal that, on average, 14.30 percent of respondents in the EU's eastern member states, including the then candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania, "tended to trust" political parties, as opposed to an average of 29.2 percent in the then 15 western member states.²¹ Mainwaring and Torcal's findings show that the new democracies had higher electoral volatility than the old ones: it was 40.75 percent on average in the eastern member states as opposed to 13.44 percent in the western ones.²² Lower party membership figures suggest that fewer people participated in party building and organization in the EU's eastern member states. Less trust in parties and higher electoral volatility indicate that parties in the region's countries could not appeal effectively to their potential voters, nor could they mobilize their most likely supporters, notably citizens whose votes they had earned at least once before.

Speaking of postcommunist countries, O'Dwyer observes that, because of small party memberships and limited membership dues, parties must rely on state jobs and resources to honor party organizers' work.²³ Kopecký also mentions parties' weak social roots in Central and Eastern Europe when describing what he calls the "party colonization of the state," a strategy whereby "state resources are traded for political support" in order to enable

parties “to compensate their feeble position in society by maintaining a strong grip over the public sector.”²⁴ Party colonization of the state is intended to enhance party patronage, as “public jobs are allocated to party supporters as a reward for services rendered, or as a prepayment for services to be provided in the future.”²⁵ Since Michels’s landmark book *Political Parties* (1911), political scientists have widely considered parties to have a vested interest in maximizing their power and stabilizing their positions.²⁶

I argued in the previous section that theories of media capture do not offer the full picture when it comes to explaining parties’ efforts to control the media in general and public service broadcasters in particular. In fact, some of the politicians interviewed during the research hinted at other possible motives. In the Czech Republic, a senior representative of the TOP 09 party said that “the public service media are big business; there is a lot of money involved in them. [Control over public broadcasters] is a question of business rather than influencing what the media say.” In Hungary, a former senior member of the SZDSZ said that “the buying of films, who was employed, and who was on the screen—all of this was about the money... If a company is commissioned to produce a program, it can afford to produce campaign material for party X.” Another interviewee, representing the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), noted—and this is worth quoting at some length—that “the media are big business. Certain companies can be commissioned for certain [public service] programs, but it is not film production companies that profit from this and that would immediately transfer a part of the money to the party, even though there might be the usual percentage [to be paid for corruption]. Rather, it is the intellectual and cultural circle around the party that is being fed this way. You can call it indirect party funding, even though the money is not spent on party events but on building a clientele.”

In light of this, theories of party colonization of the state should be extended to also relate to the media. Party colonization of the media may be defined as a strategy aimed at extracting from the media resources such as airtime, frequencies, positions, and money and channeling them to party loyalists in order to reward them for various services. It may target all media—public and private alike—but its primary targets are the regulatory authorities and public service broadcasters, which parties may oversee more easily than private outlets as the appointment mechanisms of their regulatory boards are designed so as to enable them to delegate their supporters to these institutions. Most of the new democracies’ parties are still in an early phase of party building and are lacking close links with society, for which they try to compensate through media colonization,

while the old democracies' parties have been able to establish closer links with society over the past several decades, and hence need not colonize the media, or not as extensively as their counterparts in the new democracies do. This may be one of many explanations for the deficit of media freedom that one can discern in several of the Central and Eastern European countries as opposed to most of Western Europe.

The concept of *media colonization* is thus both narrower and broader than that of *media capture*. It is narrower in that it focuses on state media and party control, and largely ignores the influence of private outlets and business groups. And it is broader in that, in addition to the distortion of information, it also associates other purposes with control over the media, notably the extraction of resources (while at the same time acknowledging that the media's assumed impact on voting behavior is also among the many motivations for attempts to control the media).

Party colonization of the media should also be distinguished from other kin concepts, notably *press partisanship* and *political parallelism*. Seymour-Ure suggests, in the context of Western European countries, that "where competing parties exist, one might expect to find a connection not only between individual papers and parties but also a correspondence, or parallelism, between the range of papers and the range of parties," while Hallin and Mancini define political parallelism as "the extent to which the different media reflect distinct political orientations in their news and current affairs reporting, and sometimes also their entertainment content."²⁷ While media content is biased in favor of certain parties in both cases, there are major differences as well. Firstly, colonized state media are used to reach all potential voters, whereas party newspapers are principally agents of intraparty communication. Secondly, colonized state media broadcast via publicly owned frequencies, are mainly funded with taxpayers' money, while party newspapers do not typically rely on state assets, and therefore may not be used to extract public resources for partisan purposes. Thirdly, colonized state media are controlled by parties in a nontransparent manner, while party newspapers operate transparently in that the general public is aware that they are run by or associated with parties and voice partisan views. Fourthly, unlike state media, party newspapers are not expected to be neutral in political debates, nor are they expected to ensure parties' transparency and accountability. And fifthly, colonization of the media implies the involuntary submission of editors and journalists to the party will, while the party press is based on jointly shared ideological and political beliefs and loyalties as well as voluntary cooperation between party leaders and journalists.

It has been suggested that parties colonize the media in order to reach voters and to compensate for their feeble social roots by means of party patronage. But if parties in the new democracies are so weak, one may ask, how could they be able to colonize these realms?

Kopecký observes that the constitutions of all of the former communist countries that are now members of the EU define political participation almost exclusively in terms of parties, the only exception to this rule being Latvia.²⁸ Grzymała-Busse argues in a similar vein when addressing the question of how parties, if so feeble, can colonize the state, and notes that parties in Central and Eastern Europe have a practical monopoly over policy making and the redistribution of resources, due to the relative weakness of other political actors such as presidents, civil society, and the trade unions.²⁹ Put differently, parties in Central and Eastern Europe may be weaker than their counterparts in Western Europe, yet they are stronger than their potential rivals in their respective countries.

This also holds for the media: the boards of the national media authorities and public service broadcasters are designed in ways that enable parties, and especially the governing parties, to play a key part in the nomination and election of their members in nearly all of the region's countries. The exceptions are Lithuania and Slovenia, where nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also have the right to nominate members to the boards of public service broadcasters. The members of the NMHH, though, are elected by parliamentary majority in Slovenia too.

The Case of Hungary

The example of Hungary is illustrative of party colonization of the media. The posttransformation media history of the country can be divided into three distinct periods marked with different regulatory regimes. Of these, this section will give a brief overview of the first and the second, and explore in more detail the third, looking into media colonization mechanisms and the resulting channeling of resources, including airtime, frequencies, positions, and money, to party clients and hinterlands.

1. The media war (1990 to 1995)

The first period was one of a so-called *media war* fought between parties for the control of the media, especially of public service broadcasters. Between 1990 and 1995, there was no broadcasting regulation in Hun-

gary, as the coalition and the opposition parties could not agree on the text of the law, despite repeated attempts. Consequently, state-owned MR and MTV preserved their broadcasting monopoly on the national level, and private broadcasters were not licensed. By virtue of a pact between the then largest coalition force, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), and the then largest opposition party, the SZDSZ, in 1990, their directors-general were jointly appointed by then prime minister József Antall (MDF) and then president of the republic Árpád Göncz (formerly of the SZDSZ).

In an atmosphere of growing political polarization, Antall, unable to remove Elemér Hankiss (director-general of MTV) and Csaba Gombár (director-general of MR), established a second state institution, Duna TV, in 1992, gathering his party's supporters, and channeled the budgets of MTV and MR under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office. Finally, in early 1993, the directors-general of both MTV and MR were removed, and party loyalists were appointed to replace them. This was followed by the sacking of 129 staff who were critical of the government, and their replacement with progovernment journalists.

The next government, that of the MSZP in coalition with the SZDSZ and headed by then prime minister Gyula Horn, began its rule by sacking the leaders of MTV and MR, a move which was again followed by the massive dismissal of journalists, this time a total of 174 people.³⁰

Freedom House's historical press freedom data go back to 1993 only. In the last three years of the media war period, the organization granted Hungary 30–38 points, listing it with the “partly free press” countries.

2. Multiparty control over the media (1996 to 2010)

The second period may be described as one of gradual *consolidation of media freedom*. It was marked by the adoption of Act I of 1996 on Radio and Television Broadcasting with a consensus of all but one of the parties in parliament, including those of the opposition. This resulted in the launch of nationwide private broadcasters in 1997 and 1998, and the ensuing ending of the public service broadcasters' monopoly. This period lasted until early 2010.

The 1996 radio and television act established boards of trustees to head the three public broadcasters. The executive committees of the boards consisted of at least eight members, half of whom were delegated by the coalition and the other half by the opposition parties. The chairpersons of the boards were elected by parliament (i.e., technically the governing par-

ties), and the vice-chairpersons were nominated by the opposition parties. In addition to the parties' nominees, professional and civic organizations could also delegate members to the boards, but their powers were significantly lesser than those of the executive committees, the latter being in control of the appointment of the directors-general as well as the approval of the institutions' annual financial plans. Despite this arrangement, the firing of old senior managers and editors and the hiring of new ones after changes of government continued to be a recurring practice throughout this second period.

The law also established the NMHH and the National Radio and Television Board (ORTT) to manage frequency distribution and the redistribution of license fee revenues. ORTT had at least five members. The chairperson was jointly appointed by the prime minister and the president of the republic, and the members were nominated by the parliamentary groups, with each group nominating one member. ORTT made several controversial decisions regarding frequency distribution, particularly when terrestrial frequencies were distributed to nationwide commercial television channels in 1997 in an unlawful manner, as a court decision later noted.³¹

During this second period, not only public service broadcasters and the NMHH but also private broadcasters were submitted to multiparty control. As a contemporary observer noted, "party people sit on the supervising authority of the media as well as the National Radio and Television Board; furthermore, an inter-party bargain made it possible for the two commercial channels to be granted frequencies by this body, even though they submitted deficient tenders. . . . In both [private] television channels there was an advisory body of party delegates operating until quite recently. At RTL Klub, for instance, it was an advisor to the Prime Minister who occupied one of these posts, and on one occasion she did indeed interfere in the editing of a comedy show. It is a daily practice that parties and ministries make phone calls to news editors when they wish to make a half-minute appearance."³²

The way in which resources extracted from the media were redistributed to support parties' clients and hinterlands is poorly documented. What may be known is that, for example, in 2004 ORTT distributed over Ft 36.2 billion (approximately €14,385,000 at the 2004 average exchange rate) to various projects, including program production, conferences, concerts, film festivals, and media research.³³ In the same year, MTV's annual budget was Ft 30 billion (€11,920,000), of which an estimated Ft 20

billion was spent on worker's wages and maintenance, and only Ft 10 million on program production.³⁴

How exactly ORTT's budget was spent is difficult to trace back today, especially as links between beneficiary companies and parties are anything but transparent, yet the amounts are considerable for a country of Hungary's size. One brief example, though, may shed some light on how the system worked. In 2007, ORTT imposed a special fine on the commercial television channel RTL Klub. The authority's income generated this way was distributed to support cultural events, film production, and book publishing. Each of ORTT's then six members had a budget of Ft 12 million (€47,750 at the 2007 average exchange rate) to support projects of their own choosing, and the authority as a whole a further Ft 38 million (€151,210) to distribute jointly. László Meszleny, delegated to ORTT by the KDNP, granted support from his budget to *Porta*, the monthly magazine of his party.³⁵

During this period of multiparty media control, the status of media freedom as measured by Freedom House improved constantly, albeit hectically, from 31 points in 1996 to 23 points in 2009. Party representatives sitting on the various boards could mutually restrain each other's efforts to exert excessive control over the media. The governing parties, however, had a greater influence than opposition parties. Throughout most of the period, the news and current affairs programs of public service broadcasters displayed a marked progovernment bias. In 1999, for example, the then government and the coalition parties featured in 76–84 percent of all domestic political news broadcasts on MTV; on several issues, only coalition politicians were asked to comment, while the opposition did not get any airtime at all.³⁶

3. One-party control over the media (2010 to present day)

The improvement of media freedom was no longer the case during the third period, which started in mid-2010 and is best described as the *deconsolidation of media freedom*. The winner of the elections, Viktor Orbán's Christian, national, and conservative government, used its supermajority of mandates to change the media legislation and adopted Act CIV of 2010 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content (the so-called "media constitution") and the "Multimedia Act," which regulate all outlets on all platforms, including print media, television, radio, and the Internet. The new regulation created a regime wherein the ruling party takes all: multiparty media control has given way to one-party control.³⁷

The new regulation established a new supervisory body called the NMHH, managed by the Media Council. The Media Council's four members were appointed by parliament's ad hoc appointment commission; currently, all of them are Fidesz nominees. The Media Council chairperson, former Fidesz member and late MP Annamária Szalai, was appointed by Prime Minister Orbán and, technically speaking, headed both the NMHH and the Media Council. The four members and the chairperson have been elected for a nine-year term. The chairperson's and the members' mandates may be renewed.

The NMHH is in charge of frequency distribution and is free to define the allocation criteria. During the first 18 months of its mandate, it distributed 35 local radio frequencies, of which 18 were granted to progovernment stations (Radio Maria obtained seven licenses, Catholic Radio two, the Protestant Radio Europe three, and Chain Bridge Radio five). At the same time, the authority refused to renew the frequency concession of long-standing left-liberal Klubrádió, the last of the opposition voices on the air.³⁸ The most valuable frequency for commercial broadcasting, reaching a potential audience of 3.3 million people, was granted to Prodo Voice, a company owned by a certain G.P.J. Ligtenberg, a close business associate of Zsolt Nyerges, the latter being a business partner of Lajos Simicska, Fidesz's former financial director.³⁹

The authority is in charge of content monitoring as well, and may impose fines of up to Ft 200 million (€716,000 at the 2011 average exchange rate) on media outlets that break the law. Whether an outlet breaks the law or not is a matter of arbitrary judgment, as the new regulation prescribes a series of undefined, and therefore rather fuzzy, restrictions on content.⁴⁰

The new regulation united MTV, MR, Duna TV, and MTI in the Public Service Foundation, managed by a board of trustees, consisting of seven members and a chairperson. The chairperson and one member are delegated by the Media Council, three members by the governing parties, and three by the opposition parties. The board elected the directors-general of the three public service broadcasters. It also elected the supervisory committee of MTI which, in turn, appointed the director-general of the news agency. Breaking with previous practice, MTI today releases news free of charge for all outlets, which has eventually led to the closing down of its only private rival, the Independent News Agency.

The new regulation also created the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) to manage the funding of the public service broadcasters MTV, MR, and Duna TV. The MTVA's director was appointed by Annamária Szalai.

The NMHH and the Media Council are in control of substantial financial resources. The 2011 budget gave the NMHH over Ft 29 billion (€10,386,500 at the 2011 average exchange rate) for its own costs, and the MTVA a budget of over Ft 63 billion (€22,563,660) to distribute; thus, the total sum Annamária Szalai ultimately controlled amounted to about 0.3 percent of the national GDP.⁴¹ The new regulation does not specify the MTVA's allocation criteria.

The new regulation outsourced the production of the three public service broadcasters' news bulletins to MTI, and that of other programs to the MTVA. The number of each of the three public service broadcasters' employees has been reduced to a mere 49 people. Hence, neither the directors-general nor the boards of trustees (having some opposition nominees) of the public service broadcasters have much influence on production and programming.⁴²

MTI's new director-general, Csaba Belényessy, is a former editor-in-chief of the pro-Fidesz Chain Bridge Radio. MTV has hired a number of pro-Fidesz journalists and activists, including Péter Obersovszky, former anchor of pro-Fidesz Echo TV, and István Gulyás, former news director of pro-Fidesz Hír TV. Philip Rákay, former master of ceremony of Fidesz's street demonstrations, was appointed supervisor of the institution. The list of freshly appointed Fidesz loyalists could be long continued. Most of them receive wages of over Ft 1 million (€3,580) a month, while the average Hungarian earns Ft 210,000 (€750).⁴³

Public service broadcasters outsource program production and advertising to companies close to the Fidesz party. For example, Hung-Ister, a firm formerly owned by Simicska, has been commissioned to produce 12 episodes of the quiz show *Hungary, I Love You* for Ft 19 million (€68,050) per episode, not including a one-off grant of nearly Ft 38 million (€136,100) to prepare the program's headline, which has also been covered by the MTVA.⁴⁴ The very same company has been commissioned to produce *Good Luck News*, broadcast on MTV for Hungary's national lottery company, for an annual amount of nearly Ft 400 million (€1,432,615).⁴⁵ The MTVA commissioned a consortium headed by a company partly owned by Simicska's wife, Publiment, to conduct an outdoor advertising campaign for MTV for over Ft 104 million (€372,480).⁴⁶ Prestige Média, headed by former Fidesz party leader Attila Várhelyi, has been contracted to provide the MTVA with general marketing and communications advice for a monthly fee of Ft 787,000 (€2,820).⁴⁷

In MTV's major evening news bulletin *Newsreel*, produced by MTI, coalition party representatives' voices were heard in 83 percent of all

news items, while the opposition parties had far less opportunity to comment on current affairs in late 2010.⁴⁸ The major news bulletin *Midday Chronicle*, broadcast on MR and produced by the same news agency, displayed a marked progovernment bias as well: in mid-2011, 74 percent of all news items covered either the government or Fidesz and the KDNP, while the opposition MSZP featured in only 19 percent of the news, Jobbik in 6 percent, and LMP hardly at all.⁴⁹

In short, Fidesz has built a centralized, pyramid-shaped institutional structure with the Media Council chairperson on top, herself appointed by the prime minister. This construction enables the governing party to control nearly all media. As noted, Freedom House downgraded Hungary: it granted 30 points to the country in 2010, as opposed to 23 in 2009. The organization's 2011 *Nations in Transit* report observes that the new media regulation "drastically curtailed the independence of public-service television and radio broadcasters, and established a new regulatory body with sweeping authority over broadcast media, print publications, and the Internet," which it describes as an "alarming concentration of political power over the media."⁵⁰ To be sure, Hungary is not China. But the mainstream media are increasingly exposed to the government's interference, and a quasi-single-party rule has been established in the media realm.

Summary and Conclusion

It has been argued in this chapter that parties assume control over the media not only in order to suppress critical voices and to gain favorable coverage, but also to extract various resources from the media. In particular, media colonization is aimed at the exploitation of the media in order to achieve the following objectives:

1. Parties may use the colonized media to *call on their constituencies* with whom they have no direct contact with otherwise, due to relatively weak party structures. For example, by gaining control over the three public service broadcasters' airtime, Fidesz may now mobilize its supporters and address undecided voters through its uniform news bulletins, which display a clear progovernment bias. Also, releasing news free of charge via the MTI, now under the direction of a Fidesz loyalist, the governing party can also shape some private outlets' news coverage.
2. Parties may use the colonized media to *deploy new resources for indirect party funding*. They may channel broadcasting frequencies as

well as financial resources devoted to program production and advertising from colonized public service broadcasters and the MTVA to private production houses and media outlets. For example, Fidesz has made sure that radio frequencies were granted either to its ideological associates such as Radio Maria and Chain Bridge Radio or to companies associated with its business hinterland such as Prodo Voice. Fidesz can also outsource program production and advertising to companies run by its supporters such as Publimont and Prestige Média.

3. Parties may use the colonized media to *engage in party patronage*. They may offer well-paying jobs to their supporters in exchange for past and future services. For example, under the Orbán government, MTI and MTV hired a number of pro-Fidesz journalists and activists such as Csaba Belénassy and Philip Rákay.
4. Parties may use media colonization to *paralyze their rivals* by denying them access to all of the above resources in order to reduce rival parties' latitude, visibility, and funding opportunities. For example, Fidesz established a media supervisory structure in such a way that rival parties' representatives are now excluded and have consequently lost control over the redistribution of various media resources.

The history of post-transformation media in Hungary, briefly outlined above, also suggests a distinction between different patterns of party colonization of the media. Multiparty colonization, whereby all parliamentary parties' nominees are granted seats in the various supervisory bodies, offers all parties' representatives a chance to mutually constrain each other's colonization opportunities. In this stalemate situation, media freedom may increase, as all parties have access to *some* resources, but none of them can control *all* resources. Single-party colonization, by contrast, offers no internal checks and balances provided by other parties' nominees, and the ruling party may abuse its influence over the media without counterpressure. As a result, media freedom may be severely restricted.

To be sure, party colonization of the media is problematic from a normative perspective. Not only is it a form of corruption in that public resources are traded for partisan loyalties, but it also blurs transparency and hinders the accountability of the political parties that control the media.

Of course, the thesis of party colonization of the media does not suggest that *any party* (or any coalition of parties) would colonize the media to an equal degree if given the opportunity. In Hungary, for example, both the left-liberal cabinet of Prime Minister Gyula Horn (1994–1998) and the

second right-conservative cabinet of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (2010–present) had about the same share of mandates in parliament (278 and 263 votes out of 386, respectively), which, theoretically speaking, enabled the both of them to amend media regulation to fit their own needs. However, the former cabinet was seeking consensual media policy and passed regulation that enabled opposition parties to delegate representatives to the media’s supervisory bodies, while the latter adopted media regulation without any consultation with the opposition of the day, and shaped the media’s supervisory structure in such a way that its own loyalists took all the decision-making positions needed to take control of the distribution of media resources. Further research, therefore, should address the question which parties are more or less likely to colonize the media, and under what conditions.

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Captured by State and Church: Civil Society in Democratic Hungary

Ágnes Kövér

Introduction

The vibrant third sector (herein referred to as the civil sector) arising from the political changes of 1989 raised the question of whether it would develop toward state control or move toward developing a robust partnership and dialogue with the state.¹ Paradoxically, both these possibilities were fulfilled in the ensuing decades, but there has more recently been an unexpected turn in a third direction. Incontestably, civic organizations became and remained dependent upon state or state-controlled funding (such as EU funds), but at the same time a new kind of partnership and dialogue with government has emerged, lately dramatically shaped and transformed by the triumphant Fidesz party, which won the 2010 elections with a two-thirds parliamentary majority.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Western observers attributed a positive and supportive role to the state, expecting the promotion of civic organizations and the encouragement of citizens' participation in them.² This "supportive" role and the pathologies of the relationship between the state and the civic organizations—traced back to pretransition times—have proved disastrous for the civil sector in Hungary.

The second failure of Western observers was to assume that the reluctance of so many "postcommunist"³ citizens to participate in voluntary organizations meant that antidemocratic organizations and movements would also have problems organizing and mobilizing, and their efforts would be hindered by the same legacy of mistrust.⁴ This assumption has been dramatically refuted by the Hungarian reality, which brought about a vital outpouring of organizations and movements on the bases of formerly

unexpressed sentiments and traditionally unspoken themes. Easily understood buzzwords were conceptualized in nationalistic, antiglobalist, and anti-EU frames. These themes had the power to mobilize people and to address formerly frustrated and suppressed claims that were neither discussed nor taken seriously by the center-left, liberal governments that came to power in the new century. These unrecognized or unsettled national grievances wore on much of the nation's mind and increasingly became a medium for abuse.

Hungary's new democratic institutions were neither grounded on an understanding of, nor actively supported by, the larger population. And this salient circumstance tended to be ignored by the "armies"⁵ of Western "democracy makers"⁶ who were marched into Central and Eastern Europe, seeking to advance their own conceptions of democratic development without a deep or adequate understanding of local conditions. Western ears were insensitive to those slight nuances that aggregated in Hungary; for example, a decade after the political transitions, a prominent feminist leader (invited several times to visit at UCLA and supported by the philanthropy of George Soros) transformed herself to become main voice of the far-right Jobbik party.

The demise of the Hungarian civil sector can ultimately be traced back not primarily to disjunctions in the relationship between the state and the civic organizations, but more to the general weakness and vulnerability of the whole sector. A number of junctures may be identified in which civic organizations came into contact with other sectors and became jeopardized by intrusion or blurred borderlines.

We can identify the obvious boundary between the state and the civil society sector. Our observations should also explore the boundaries between church and civic organizations; between political parties, movements and the civil society sector; and finally between the more established for-profit organizations and the more grassroots civic organizations.

Without claiming to exhaustively analyze the recent transformations in the Hungarian civil sector in the above list, I hereby consider only some of the most meaningful and decisive cases which illustrate the Hungarian civil society sector's "borderline disease."

Relations and Boundaries between the State and the Civil Sector

One of the leading problems that plague Hungarian civic organizations is the high level of resource dependency. Although the legal system of founding, registering, and funding civic organizations is considered to be

highly regulated, elements of independence and impartiality were built into the system, e.g., the 1 percent National Civil Fund (NCA) tax. But only a small portion of the resources sought by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) were provided via this vehicle. Beyond this, other processes of grant provisions (including EU grants) and adjudication practices that were neither transparent nor unbiased flourished even before 2010. Although civic organizations cooperated with governmental organizations (ministries, agencies, state-founded NPOs) in developing and jointly pursuing government policies, this advantage concomitantly undermined the watchdog function of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and resulted in a set of practices that took the form of visiting corridors of power, drinking and eating out with ministerial public servants, and expecting and hoping for personal and organizational advantages from these positive and close relationships.

This was a sort of continuation of the deeply socialized state socialist experience about how things can be done successfully, on both the power bearers' and the civil actors' sides. In a system where the main provider remained the state and resources were available mostly through government bodies, processes or methods of civil control were neither developed nor improved. It is not surprising that the good old reflections were revived.

The resulting gray-area practices served both sides' interests very well, and made everybody's life easier. The government and its agencies needed to be legitimized by civil society from time to time on certain questions. And civic organizations needed this good relationship to get extra opportunities, strategic contracts, etc. This manner of operation structured the selection of organizations and limited the openness, transparency, and achievement-based competitiveness of these organizations. It resulted in a biased grant distribution process, still considered unfair. Nonetheless, a number of different actors were not excluded, and the transnational Hungarian organizations were highly supported.

After 2010—we can say that there has been a new chronology since then—the system of partiality became legitimized, and grant distribution became overtly biased as a “necessary restoration” of the national and traditional value system, which strictly excluded a number of values, critical voices, and watchdog views.

One example of this manner of biased allocation of money is Government Decree 49/2011 (III.30.), which ordered the direct provision of financial support through some of the ministries to 525 organizations, visibly recognizable from their names as NGOs that highlight national, fam-

ily, and other traditional values and share these with the government parties. On this list of beneficiaries were many church organizations.

In Hungary, the Fidesz government practically dismissed the civil society organizations, replacing the formerly existing ones with a “new” set of loyalists, rooted in and grown from deeper levels of party-created and -controlled civic circles. The underlying efforts of these new players are found in the historically based tradition of a strong central state, the restored (or rather surviving) authoritarian hierarchies that successfully hindered the emergence of civil independence and autonomy.

After decades of “confusing diversity and plurality,” which neither improved people’s well-being nor found answers nor created an open discourse about crucial questions such as national identity, community, etc., citizens became vulnerable to buzzwords and promises from the radical right. The Fidesz party met people’s expectations on multiple levels. By the beginning of 2000, it began to reorganize its own civil society organizations, arranging a set of civic circles on the local community level. These circles spread nationally through a network of local cells whose main underlying values brought into play the concept of the enemy and promoted an identity contrary to that of communists or, even worse, liberals, the EU, etc. On the other hand, they provided positive actions, feelings of hope, and clear identities and experiences of community life. These civic circles were closely interwoven with the churches (mainly the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches) and their local communities. At the same time, these organizations initiated the registration of new NGOs, associations, and foundations. And, of course, they registered themselves as NGOs.

By the 2010 elections, Fidesz had thus established its own strong mass basis, undergirded by its far-flung network of civic organizations. This takes us to the Peace March organization and movement mentioned below.

After the successful election of Fidesz, the new governmental forces moved quickly to secure and financially back these organizations, thus changing the entire NGO self-governance and decision-making system. Existing bodies of representation and self-governance⁷ that had previously made decisions independently of the government were replaced by new ones for which the allocation of seats to representatives of government bodies became dominant. Thus, the opportunity for making dissident civil decisions or protest was lost. The same process occurred in the case of EU fund distribution as well.

As a result, hundreds of formerly successful organizations disappeared, a process which can be followed by searching the web, where the virtual corpses of once-flourishing NGOs are scattered.

Relations and Boundaries between the Church and Civic Organizations

Another instructive story may be drawn from the relations between church organizations and non-church NGOs and NPOs. One could ask what relevance church and church organizations might have in the field of the non-church-based civil sector. Beyond the simple fact that the boundaries between these two entities are worth observing, in the case of Hungary we find a strong history that undermines and dissolves a significant portion of non-church-based NPOs, and NGOs in the fields of social services and education. In both fields, one finds the increasingly monopolizing effect of the traditional values of the repressive Catholic mindset. Programming changes are resulting in the dissolving presence of diversity and plurality in schools and services. Alternative schools providing opportunities to minorities have been abolished; services formerly provided to those with special needs wither away as the local NPOs that used to provide these services turn to begging the church to take them over in order to survive.

The story may be traced back to the agreement signed in 1997 by the MSZP-SZDSZ government and the Vatican. This understanding provided a separate budgetary line of the annual government expenditure directed to the churches of Hungary. This step ruptured the principle of separation of church and state, with its intention to restore and remedy the losses and grievances inflicted by state socialism. Although the agreement was criticized, mostly by liberals from a theoretical perspective, nobody foresaw the consequences that would descend upon civil nonprofit actors a decade later.

Hungary's Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Services—based on principles of subsidiarity and decentralization—stipulated that social services at the local community level were to be provided under the administration of local governments. This process of decentralization gave local authorities a considerable degree of autonomy. It enabled them to expand their activities without an increase in government support, thus stimulating privatization and the transfer of authorities to for-profit organizations and NPOs operating within their jurisdictions. The system was based on contractual cooperation between the local government and the NPOs; it encouraged and motivated small organizations to provide professional services within the field of human and social services. This means of service provision was highly rational, since flexible, highly professional, small NPOs were more able to change and easily accommodate clients' needs and changing environments than local government bodies or institu-

tions. As a result, by the end of the 1990s, many hundreds of small NPO and NGO service providers were operating within the social field and were paid on a contract basis, which covered the patients' per-capita expenditures. This did not provide a particularly high level of subsistence for the organizations, but it did provide their members and employees with considerable professional standing and leeway in the provision of services. Employees were generally highly dedicated and honored to work under the conditions of an NPO that had a different organizational culture and value system than was prevalent in Hungary before.

I strongly disagree with the Western accusations⁸ that such professionalized service provider organizations neglected their roles as promoters of democracy. Rather, I believe that these civil-professional NPO service providers contributed, along with other organizations (e.g., local governments, church organizations, for-profit organizations), to a pluralistic field of social services. This kind of community pluralism, it has been contended from Dewey to Putnam, promotes and achieves democracy itself, since it multiplies the available options and services and increases clients' availability of choice.

Many critiques have been offered on the concomitant legal provisions that make difficult the initiation and registration of these service providers, which had to meet all the strict criteria conventionally applied to large government institutions. There was also criticism of the slow pace at which these processes were funded. To be sure, the continuity of these small organizations was hindered or obstructed from time to time; variations in budget periods and delays in financial administration sometimes left NPOs with budget gaps that lasted for months. But these problems and phenomena were regularly debated, and the organizations evinced high levels of interest in cooperating and coping with these difficulties.

The first signs of malady appeared at the beginning of the 2000s, when NPOs began to encounter new and fundamental difficulties in funding their organizations. Core costs (administration, maintenance, etc.) had never been covered by standard expenditures,⁹ but rather by independent resources (e.g., NCA, program grants). The per-capita standard expenditure was set annually by the government and allocated to the local government within a budgetary term. Humanitarian and service provider NPOs started to face significant difficulties with not being able to fund the whole year or not being able to bridge the period when the budget was not provided.

By this time, church organizations had become quite common in the local field of service provision, contracting under the same conditions as

other NPOs. Of course, there is a significant financial difference between NPOs and church organizations, which arises from the state support based on the Vatican agreement and is enshrined in Act CXXVII 2007 on Value Added Tax. This support comes on top of the regular standard expenditures in the case of church services. Additionally, it must be remembered that considerable wealth has been returned to the historical churches in Hungary, and that 1 percent of taxpayers' sums could be offered exclusively to churches. Additionally, the missing taxpaying obligations after church taxes and other income come from worshipper offerings. Thus, we encounter a financially flourishing set of organizations, unlike the NPOs, which are highly burdened by taxes, usually not do receive much from the 1 percent NCA, and struggle with funding scenarios in which organizational overhead is not covered at all.

In this unequal competitive situation—a consequence of a variety of unforeseen and unwittingly planned processes—humanitarian and service provider NPOs were bled of their resources over the course of the 2000s. They were left with the choice of being closed down, merged into to one of the local faith-based services, or being transformed (after receiving ecclesiastical approval) into a church organization offering their services under the aegis of one of the strong churches.

This unintended but not reflected dismantling of the civil sector led to a significant weakening of democracy in Hungary. The politically reckless government elite showed little interest in the field of humanitarian and social services or the plight of the most indigent part of society; it stood idly by and witnessed the takeover of the sector by church organizations.

In October 2013, the Vatican agreement was renewed, Bible education was introduced into the public schools, and the state promised further financial support for church services, which are rapidly becoming the exclusive provider of social services. Local governments, themselves struggling with scarce government funding, acquiesced in the centralization of the country's social systems, including education, and welcomed the fiscal relief provided by this offloading of responsibilities. Hungary's historical churches resumed their medieval role as the primary force in the nation's dependent third sector.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 2000s, Western observers (who did a lot and gained a lot for themselves writing books, developing theories, consulting, etc. by conducting research in Hungary) identified three main reasons for

the low level of civic engagement in the Central and Eastern European countries: (1) the legacy of mistrust of the “communist”¹⁰ state and formal organizations, (2) the persistence of friendship networks, and (3) “post-communist” disappointment.¹¹ Unfortunately, it was not recognized that these features cut across the boundaries of civil society and persist with their unrecognized but still legal, if illegitimate, claims. The later criticism by Western supporters—that they contributed to the emergence of an elite located mainly in big cities and centered on social-liberal values¹²—may be valid, but we must take into consideration that Western attenders and funders had a very low capacity (and level of interest) in understanding the lives of local people and the methods of former socialist oppression and its consequences. Since they were not able to speak the language, they were not able to reach communities in Hungary’s vast countryside, nor could they communicate with people who could not express themselves using Western means of expression. They thereby perceived a distorted version of reality. Unfortunately, they concentrated on their own values and intentions to deliver Western democracy to the East: from the superior to the inferior, from the higher to the lower. It was they who established the frames of communication. Locals who had access to these resources and relationships used this opportunity as best they could, but sometimes they may have been swayed by the incomplete observations of Western visitors.

The author of this article strongly agrees with the young representatives of European Alternatives (an organization that promotes democracy, equality, and culture beyond the nation state) in that we have to dissolve the very distinctions between “East” and “West,” which imply superiority or inferiority, if we are to reclaim these relationships. Future cooperation between us—networks of activists, scientists, scholars, and researchers—should go beyond the traditional forms of third-sector mores and practices as usually orchestrated from donor centers in the richer countries of the West. It seems it is time to end the preemption of the possibility of endogenous politics by hierarchical financial and symbolic relations.¹³

The unanswered question remains of whether civic organizations are really able to promote democracy.¹⁴ The sociopolitical realities of political systems, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (in other words, the postsocialist countries)—clientelism, vertical institutional structures, corruption, and pervasive inequality—pose insurmountable obstacles to the strengthening of civil society and the fostering of democracy.¹⁵ Let me use the analogy of Africa as made by Suleiman: the interventionist concept in the context of African participatory governance processes acts not to chal-

lenge the status quo, but often contributes to its maintenance by building cosmetic social consensus and legitimatizing antidevelopmental politics.¹⁶ Observing the current Hungarian realities, to which this analogy is highly applicable, I suggest we take into consideration the case of the Peace March movement and the organizational process and structure behind it: it was founded to support, confirm, and justify existing government decisions and ways of governing in front of the watching world.

The short and sad story of the Hungarian civil sector told in this chapter concludes, at least for the present, with a highly manipulated, monopolized, and authority-based system, one where citizens confront few alternatives beyond settings that are controlled and dominated by the central party. Older democracies had centuries to develop their at least quasi-independent sectors, established with some distance from their central governments, filling gaps in services or advocacy through the actions and involvement of civic organizations and civic consciousness. Unfortunately, Hungary remains entangled with the fossils of its historical past, having not yet been given the time and space to achieve the necessary learning and appreciate the opportunities presented by democratic ideas and structures.

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Political Empowerment or Political Incarceration of Romani? The Hungarian Version of the Politics of Dispossession

Angéla Kóczé

Following 1989, Hungarian society went through an extraordinary economic, political, and social transformation that significantly influenced the overall situation of its Roma population.¹ The Hungarian regime change was strongly connected to external political forces such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, the violent breakdown of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the enlargement of NATO and the accession process, and, more recently, the integration of former socialist countries in the EU.

Sigona and Trehan point out that in this new geopolitical order Europe became supported and combined with new neoliberal economic policies and political orders.² The international political pressures—in conjunction with the new global free-market economic trend and postsocialist domestic, industrial, and social policy schemes—created a new regime. This type of system that characterizes Hungary and the other Visegrád states (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland) was categorized as an “embedded neoliberal” situation by Bohle and Greskovits.³ They argued that these countries, including Hungary at the beginning of the 1990s, were less market-radical than the Baltic states and therefore achieved better results in building new competitive industries, and were socially more inclusive. However, as they also pointed out, the institutions that are supposed to safeguard macroeconomic stability have either not been established or do not function independently from government in most Visegrád states so far.⁴ Bohle and Greskovits in recent interviews state that Hungary in fact stepped out of the category of embedded neoliberalism and created a new variation of neoliberal regime. It did so while keep-

ing the same neoliberal strategies such as increasing employment (mainly state-funded public work) while reducing social welfare expenditures, creating a new identity politics, and promoting domestic capitalists while socially and economically suppressing large populations not viewed as compatible with the government's social and economic politics.⁵ Prominent among these socially and economically deprived individuals are the ethnically distinguished Roma people. This type of experimental identity-based political regime, I will argue, ultimately leads to an exclusionary democracy.

In this chapter I attempt to describe the Hungarian exclusionary political path that has gradually developed over the last two decades. My main objective is to map how Romani were positioned in the context of Hungarian political transformations after 1989 and to observe some trends regarding their political positioning. I will borrow terms from neo-Marxist, postcolonial, and feminist theories such as *politics of dispossession* and apply them to recent political developments in Hungary. I argue that Romani were caught between different internal (in-group) and external (out-group) political processes of the Hungarian political transformation over a period of decades. Being in this trap further disadvantaged them, racialized their political place, and most dramatically dispossessed them politically.

I first examine the directions taken by Roma and non-Roma political actors to pave the way toward Roma political participation and emancipation. In the title of the chapter, I raise the straightforward question of how we should characterize the installation of contemporary Roma politics in 2013 in Hungary. Does it serve as political empowerment, or it is rather a political incarceration that has been partly (but most influentially) caused by the state-driven Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (the "Minority Law")?⁶ The Minority Law has been considered a *Hungaricum* in Europe and has been presented as a model to other European countries. It claims to strengthen minority political representation, but instead has worked to limit Roma political opportunities.⁷ The minority self-government system provided by the Minority Law, as I will argue, has actually worked to reduce the political rights of Romani.

Besides the state-driven Minority Law and the associated system of minority self-government, two other political forces have shaped and facilitated Roma political representation: these are the Roma civil-rights organizations and the mainstream political parties. Both the conjunction and the contentious political interplay between these three main forces have shaped the contours and the prospects of Roma political participation in Hungary.

Economic Deprivation is a Condition for Political Dispossession

It is my view that the contentious political forces and the precarious economic and social situation in Hungary have had a detrimental and explicitly exclusionary impact on the political participation of Romani. Their dilapidated social and economic situation did not generate political mobilization and civic participation among the Roma population; it rather strengthened their submissive status via various exclusionary political mechanisms in Hungarian society.⁸ Later in the chapter, I will give a more specific account of how such mainstream political processes are excluding Romani.

When minority groups such as the Roma people are squeezed out from the sphere of mainstream political representation by political parties, and the state does not provide them fair and representation and treatment, these groups often mobilize and organize their own structures of representation to articulate their interests. In 2013 there was an attempt in Hungary to establish a Roma political party, even among the most progressive Roma-rights activists (who previously did not support such a party). Romani lack efficient political representation from the existing mainstream parties as well as from the minority self-government system.⁹ In the last two decades, a limited number of civil-society actors attempted to articulate Roma interests and also tried to influence and transform mainstream political structures, but their efforts were not accompanied by any substantial grass-roots mobilization.¹⁰ Hungarian electoral democracy, without preferential mechanisms in place, saw the triumph of majoritarian norms and preferences over the needs and interests of its socially and politically deprived minority groups, such as the Roma people.

The neoliberal economic shift in Hungary, and elsewhere at the global level, has been manifested by intensive privatization and an increasingly unequal distribution of property and other valued resources into the hands of a small, privileged portion of the population.¹¹ Meanwhile, a significant number of the population became poorer and further marginalized in every aspect of their lives. This process has been characterized as “accumulation by dispossession” by David Harvey, who defines the neoliberal changes as being directed mainly by four practices: privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistribution.¹² Applying Harvey’s concept in the Hungarian context, we see the newly constructed and promoted Hungarian capitalist class accumulating their assets and political power at the expense of the marginalized and excluded populations, in which Romani are overrepresented.¹³

The logic of the free market defines what and who is worthy and unworthy, not just in economic and financial terms but also regarding landscapes, geographies and specific groups in a society. For instance, socially and economically underdeveloped areas such as ghettos, slums, or segregated settlements are not valued and do not attract significant capital investment. Consequently, from a neoliberal economic point of view, the marginalized population living in deprived conditions, including Romani, simply becomes disposable from this economic perspective, since its contribution is not relevant to the legal economy. However, its role in the illegal opportunities provided by black markets in economically gray areas is an interest of the system itself because it contributes to the accumulation of the capital class. In addition, these illegal activities make it legitimate to deprive such “offenders” of social and political rights. As Júlia Szalai observes, “the maintenance of deep poverty is backed by hidden interests. It is worth considering that caring for the poor provides regular income and jobs to several thousands of people. And the majority in any society needs the poorer members: they are the cheapest source of labor for any kind of work. The poor are a readily available workforce.”¹⁴ I would argue further and state that to keep people in entrenched poverty by the mechanism of dispossession creates a set of political conditions which serve the interests of the political class by excluding Romani from the political process.

I agree with those scholars who conceptualize neoliberalism as a more complex phenomenon than a mere economic doctrine. As pointed out by Johanna Oskola, the neoliberal order fundamentally shapes our current experience of the world by forming the conditions that also shape and influence our political condition.¹⁵ In other words, we must question the political neutrality of the neoliberal market economic change in Hungary and elsewhere, and understand the ways in which it results in increasing ethnically and socially based territorial segregation, impoverishment, and social and economic marginalization. In other words, racially and socially based territorial segregation is not a spontaneous social phenomenon but is rather the result of various political and policy decisions that intensify the mechanisms of dispossession.

Huub van Baar argues that neoliberal governance at the national and European levels has depoliticized Roma issues. Instead of state redistribution, democratic participation and social responsibility, this mode of government control focuses on free-market inclusion and consumerism and, particularly in the case of Romani, leaves them highly exposed socially, politically, and economically.¹⁶ Even the most progressive political actors

come to see Roma issues only from a narrow point of view. Instead of problematizing the historical and cultural racism and the systemic structural exclusion of Romani, they see their marginalization and exclusion as a result of the Roma population's own problems with morality and cultural traditions. They suggest that all the structural problems faced today by Romani need to be addressed and solved by Romani themselves.

This view is internalized by number of politicians in Hungary, regardless of party affiliation. In January 1998, for example, under the social-liberal government, Prime Minister Gyula Horn, at the congress of *Lungo Drom* (i.e., the National Gypsy Interest Association) in Szolnok, made a statement urging Romani to distance themselves from "those who live off crime" in their community.¹⁷ He made this statement at a time when Roma unemployment was high. Although over 85 percent of Roma males aged 15–59 and 30 percent of Roma females aged 15–54 had been regularly employed and had earned incomes (the corresponding figures in the total population were 87 and 64 percent, respectively) in 1971, Romani were systematically pushed out of the labor market starting in the late 1980s. By 1993, this trend had resulted in shockingly high unemployment figures for Romani.

Kertesi and Kézdi showed through their large-scale representative data that in 1994, Roma employment was below 30 percent among men and at 17 percent among women, and it did not improve much afterward. By 2003, employment of Roma men was at a mere 32 percent, and that of Roma women stayed at 17 percent. The difference between the Roma and the national employment rate was 36–37 percent in 1994. It increased to 40 percent by 2003 because of rising employment among non-Roma people but not among Roma people.¹⁸

In addition, Gyula Horn declared that unemployed Romani should not claim housing rights.¹⁹ At that same time, a number of evictions of Romani were taking place in Hungary. On December 10, 1998, several human-rights organizations reported that authorities in District VIII of Budapest had begun evicting families who were illegally residing there in mid-November 1998. This was well documented by NGOs, such as the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, that a large part of the evicted families were Roma.²⁰

Shortly after Gyula Horn left office, the same message was perpetuated by Viktor Orbán, prime minister of the first Fidesz government in 1998. Orbán rather cynically offered employment and education to a Roma population suffering from high unemployment rates and facing a wide range of educational discrimination.

The same perception that holds the long-term unemployed (in which Romani are overrepresented) responsible for their own social and economic deprivation became institutionalized in the 2008 Way to Work public work program of the Hungarian Socialist Party–Alliance of Free Democrats (MSZP-SZDSZ) government.²¹ Following financial austerity measures, the government restructured and significantly reduced the system of social benefits. It was articulated several times that the idea behind the public work program was to promote and maintain a work habit for those who do not want to work within the labor market. The suggestion is that unemployment is not a structural issue, but rather represents personal deviant behavior. This message is often reiterated by politicians, even socialist ones. It is easily translatable for the public, which has a negative attitude toward people who find themselves trapped in poverty, seeing them simply as lazy and taking advantage of social benefits. The public work system suggests that it is altogether proper for people to be required to work in order to receive social benefits.

Several studies show that the public work program is quite an expensive government program that does not increase the employability of the unemployed workforce. Rather, these studies show that unemployment status among Romani is conserved and maintained.²² Contrary to these findings, the public work program in 2011, under the second Orbán government, was presented as the only solution to provide economic opportunity to a long-unemployed and largely uneducated people.

According to the 2013 Civil Society Monitoring Report,²³ many people are forced into the public work program that involves severe conditions and sanctions. Romani are reportedly discriminated against even when applying for the program. Those who are not able to access the program are highly affected by the risk of being excluded from social services. According to current regulations, in order to be eligible for basic social benefits, at least 30 days of employment must be officially certified on a yearly basis. Small underdeveloped settlements are not in a position to offer meaningful jobs for every person eligible for the public work program. The report also pointed out that the current government introduced some restrictive measures that further disadvantaged Romani. Based on NGO reports, a substantial number of adults living in Roma communities in conditions of deep poverty are not receiving any social benefits and are indeed being excluded from receiving welfare services.

The dispossessed position became accepted and normalized by the current governing parties. Zsolt Bayer, a prominent conservative commentator closely connected to the current right-wing government and political

elite, has sparked outrage many times in Hungary and abroad for comparing Romani to animals and saying they “shouldn’t be allowed to exist.” Bayer’s writings are promoted in the ultra-right-wing newspaper *Magyar Hírlap*, which has close ties to the current conservative government. In some of his writing, he explicitly supports the extermination of the Roma people: “A significant part of the Roma are unfit for coexistence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals, and they behave like animals. When they meet with resistance, they commit murder. They are incapable of human communication. Inarticulate sounds pour out of their bestial skulls. At the same time, these Gypsies understand how to exploit the ‘achievements’ of the idiotic Western world. But one must retaliate rather than tolerate. These animals shouldn’t be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved—immediately and regardless of the method.”²⁴

Bayer refers to impoverished Roma people living in segregated communities without basic infrastructure and access to social services. Instead of problematizing their structural deprivation, he spews, in highly crude language, outmoded social-Darwinian explanations that certain Romani are simply “unfit for coexistence.” His statements suggest and reinforce the message that the integration of Romani and the improvement of their economic and social situation exclusively depends on their own efforts, and not at all on actions of the dominant society. This view is replicated in more modest and subtler ways by several other politicians in Hungary.

It is evident that a core issue to be addressed is how Romani are portrayed in a political discourse. As the *Spiegel International* article indicates, Bayer is not just some random pathological Roma-hater. He is a founding member of the country’s conservative governing Fidesz party and a close friend of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Although Bayer holds no official position in the party and the government, he is widely known as an influential person. Bayer was criticized neither by the prime minister nor by Roma politicians who represent the Fidesz party in the Hungarian and European parliaments. It is the case that he was criticized by Tibor Navracsics, who is both minister of justice and deputy prime minister in the Hungarian government, but this statement was seen by many as mere gesture aimed at maintaining a good reputation in the EU for the Hungarian government.

Over the last two decades in the EU countries, including Hungary, the situation of Romani has not improved, and in many instances has even worsened, as documented by large-scale sociological data.²⁵ To summarize the Roma employment situation, the following findings are common:

- Romani face much higher vulnerability and uncertainty compared to non-Roma employees in general at the labor market.
- They have a lower level of income, often due to the absence of protection for informal or occasional employees.
- As for Roma education, segregation is still a concern in the Hungarian educational system, as is the lack of access to early child development and preschool services.
- Similar findings could be supplemented by mentioning the alarming health and segregated housing situation of Romani.

In summary, these many empirical studies show that the promise of freedom, prosperity, social mobilization, and wealth was never possible for the large majority of Roma population in Hungary and elsewhere, even before the 2008 economic crisis.

I would argue that in Hungary (and elsewhere in the EU) the social and economic exclusion of Romani in the new neoliberal economic regime has been supported and justified by covert and overt anti-Gypsy political discourse. In the current Hungarian political discourse, the complexity and structural feature of Roma exclusion is reduced to problems of Roma morality and cultural traditions that hold them back from social integration.

I emphasize that race- and class-based forces intersect to create these exclusionary social and economic patterns, ultimately producing a dispossessed Roma population that is economically, socially, and politically deprived. Moreover, these exclusionary mechanisms create and reproduce a population that comes to be seen as politically disposable.

Emerging Roma Voice at the National and Transnational Level after 1989

This chapter cannot provide an exhaustive analysis of Roma political participation in Hungary; however, it is intended to highlight the most important historical episodes that have contributed to the existing situation and created silent sufferers (instead of active citizens) in the political sphere.

The emergence of transnational Roma politics has had tangible influence on Hungarian Roma politics. In light of the 1989 changes, the Roma issue became a subject on the political agenda in the postcommunist countries. Parallel to the political change, Romani could establish various associations, foundations, and even political parties—as they did in some countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria. Several articles show the expan-

sion and gradual influence of civil-society and third-sector organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. This process was characterized as “NGO-ization” by several scholars, referring to the various roles of NGOs, including their social and political roles and ideological character.²⁶

Some authors emphasize the instrumental character used by the EU to exert pressure upon the state to place stronger priority on integration of Roma vis-à-vis human rights or minority rights frameworks.²⁷ In the 1990s, in addition to Roma NGOs, there were significant numbers of pro-Roma non-Roma NGOs that strove to support the Roma cause in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe. One of the issues raised by Trehan and Kóczé was that these organizations, instead of facilitating and strengthening the voice of the Roma people, often played a gatekeeper role to control information and resources and to actively shape and prioritize the politics of Roma issues at the national and transnational levels.²⁸

The most important pro-Roma organization that promoted and still supports Roma causes in the region is the Open Society Institute (OSI), founded by George Soros; national Soros foundations also played a significant role in the 1990s and beyond. The OSI not only financially supported and provided a political backbone for a significant number of Roma initiatives, but also established several organizations that influenced Roma-related policies, such the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), Roma Educational Fund, and lately the Roma Decade Secretariat. So the thriving Roma civil society at the transnational level created a context in which to fight for Roma civil and political rights in Hungary too. Ágnes Daróczi, Menyhért Lakatos, and other prominent Hungarian Roma became icons for their achievements in transnational Roma politics.

Structure and Legacy of Roma Political Participation in Hungary

With respect to Hungarian Roma civil society, from the beginning of the 1990s the national Soros foundations played a critical role by generously supporting Roma civic and political initiatives in Hungary. One of the most significant of the Roma organizations, established in 1989, was called Brotherhood (Phralipe). The dynamic young Aladár Horváth, who became known for leading the anti-ghetto committee in Miskolc; Ágnes Daróczi, journalist and cultural activist employed by the Ministry of Culture; Jenő Zsigó, social worker and head of the Budapest-funded Gypsy Social, Cultural, and Methodology Centre; and Béla Osztójkán, writer and political activist—all played key roles in the development of an independ-

ent Roma voice within the Hungarian political and public sphere. These were the founding members of the Brotherhood, the first Roma civil-rights advocacy group in postsocialist Hungary. They were largely supported by progressive intellectuals, such as Ottília Solt, Zsolt Csalog, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, and Gábor Havas, all of whom were prominent dissidents under state socialism. Their activities were respected and supported by the national Soros foundations as well as by the progressive political elite.

At a very early stage of the political transformation in Hungary, Aladár Horváth in 1988 established the Anti-Ghetto Committee in Miskolc. This act of nonviolence and critical resistance was used strategically against the local communist power's plan to ghettoize Romani and mobilized Roma and non-Roma opposition to create a civic alliance and disobedience in the city.²⁹ This collective resistance stimulated civil-rights awareness and activities among Romani with the substantial support of non-Roma dissidents and oppositions. Aladár Horváth reflected on his collaboration with oppositions in a 2013 interview:

I attended several meetings and discussions organized by the oppositions in Budapest. There I met with Gábor Havas, János Ladányi, and András Biró, and I asked them to come to Miskolc and support me against the ghettoization plan of the local power. With my intellectual friends from Miskolc, and Gypsies who understood the situation, along with some members of opposition groups in Budapest, I created the Anti-Ghetto Committee... It was likely the first citizens' movement in Europe ... the first Romani citizens' movement... In 1989, we were successful and the local council had to withdraw their decision due to the pressure and civic resistance that we showed there in collaboration with the local Roma. As a result of my activities in Miskolc, I became nominated by the SZDSZ to run for political office at the first national election in Hungary.³⁰

The SZDSZ contained among its members the most progressive forces that collaborated closely with the Brotherhood. Besides Aladár Horváth, they also nominated Antonia Hága to be an MP. In the first Hungarian parliament between 1990 and 1994, there were three Roma MPs, two of whom were on the SZDSZ list. In addition, the well-known painter Tamás Péli was elected by the MSZP.

In this early stage of the political transformation, mainstream political leaders, such as liberals in the SZDSZ and social reformers in the MSZP, were very sensitive toward discrimination and human-rights abuses against Romani. Their sensitivity was evident in the first multiparty Hungarian parliament, and the newly elected liberal and progressive MPs urged the government to enforce protection of Romani and strengthen the

rule of law in Hungary. Among other progressive MPs were Ferenc Kőszeg, president of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee; Gábor Havas, a leading sociologist who participated in the Roma representative survey in 1971; Ottília Solt, founder of the Fund to Support the Poor (SZETA); Tibor Derdák, teacher and founder of Gandhi Secondary School; and Gábor Iványi, a Methodist pastor, another founder of SZETA, and a constant voice for the poor and homeless.

One of the significant political events and largest mass demonstrations was organized by the Roma Parliament and the Brotherhood in Eger on July 11, 1993, with the strong support of the most progressive and prominent Hungarian political elite. This protest highlighted the rising racist violence against Romani, and called out the new wave of fascism, represented in Eger by a notorious skinhead movement.³¹ Several thousand Roma and non-Roma demonstrators attended this event, protesting the lack of implementation of the rule of law and the lack of police protection, and also urging the protection of civil rights for Romani. This public protest became a symbol of the strategic solidarity and collaboration between Romani and the non-Roma political elite.

The Roma Parliament³² was established in 1990 by the same people who established the Brotherhood. Their aim was to bring together all the Roma organizations and represent Roma interests in the Hungarian political arena. From the very beginning they were able to bring together both progressive and more conservative Roma organizations.

Parallel to the progressive civil-rights forces there was another political scheme developed by Flórián Farkas, who is still playing an important role in the current political regime. Over several decades, Farkas became an overarching personality in Hungarian Roma politics. He continues to play a significant role in the architecture of Roma politics via the Hungarian political system. Farkas is from a small town, the former communist stronghold of Szolnok in central Hungary. Before the changes in 1987, he was the secretary of the National Gypsy Council (OCÖ) under the state socialist system. In 1989 he became secretary of the progovernment Democratic Association of Gypsies under the leadership of Gyula Náday. The association became the largest Gypsy organization and explicitly opposed the Brotherhood, which was far more progressive and critical of state policies. Farkas, through various regimes, always seemed able to forge alliances with the Hungarian state on Roma policies. As noted by several scholars and his Roma political peers, Farkas acted as a clever political operator/manipulator.³³ From 1996 to 1998 he was under investigation for corruption charges by the Office of the Prosecutor General. He

managed to obtain amnesty from president Árpád Göncz in 1998, and thus kept the status of head of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government (NGMS) of Hungary from 1995 to 2002.

Farkas and his alliance left the Roma Parliament very early on and, with substantial support from various state institutions, contributed to the fragmentation of the first unifying Roma political organization.³⁴ These bifurcated divisions were sustained and strengthened by internal and external political interests.

Development of the Roma Political Hungaricum

The contentious dynamic between these parallel initiatives, namely the progressive line versus the pro-state conservative, in the context of the (lack of) support of the various Hungarian political administrations and civil human-rights regimes, created the basic structure and legacy of Roma political participation in Hungary.

The architecture of Roma political participation has been strengthened by the construction and implementation of the Minority Law, which was enacted in 1993 by the Hungarian parliament. This new legislation created a unique opportunity for national and ethnic minority groups in Hungary to voice minority interests through the formation of local and national minority self-governments.³⁵ With a mandate to protect the “cultural autonomy” of Hungary’s minority populations, minority self-governments are established as a part of the political-institutional body.³⁶

In 1993, Aladár Horváth, as a Roma MP, made the case in parliament that illuminated how the minority self-government system built into the Minority Law would disadvantage Roma political participation. He and the other progressive Roma leaders believed that the minority self-government system with the support of the state would monopolize Roma representation. Instead of supporting the participation of Romani, the councils were seen to create segregated, state-controlled, and institutionalized Roma participation detached from mainstream political mechanisms. Based on these views, Horváth was the only MP who voted explicitly against the Minority Law.

Horváth’s views on the operation of the minority self-government system have generally been confirmed within the last decade. Nevertheless, large numbers of Roma leaders—particularly those in the countryside affiliated with *Lungo Drom*—have tacitly accepted the importance of the minority self-government system, which they view as a type of training

ground for a career in professional politics as community representatives. Also, to be a representative in the local minority self-government system provides public visibility and prestige for the marginalized members of Roma communities.

The most developed and most controlled structure of the Roma minority self-government system is functioning under the current regime under the leadership of Flórián Farkas. The central government's exclusive Roma partner is the National Roma Self-Government (ORÖ), which is strongly supported by the current government and heavily based on representatives of Lungo Drom, an ally of Fidesz. Farkas himself is a Fidesz MP, as well as president of the ORÖ. This is highly problematic because this political arrangement ultimately excludes a large range of non-Lungo Drom Roma interest groups and NGOs.³⁷ Despite the political mandate of the ORÖ (to protect cultural autonomy), it possesses unprecedented power and control in all major Roma-related policies and projects. Even though it lacks professional expertise on Roma-related policy making and skill to implement projects, the government is using it as a service provider institution, not as a body that provides political representation.

It exists on the very lines that the current government wants to establish, a centrally governed institution where reward is based upon political loyalty. At the same time, this current formation of Roma minority self-government also serves to detach and depoliticize Roma claims that might be directed toward mainstream politics.

In July 2013, several opposition Roma leaders signed a letter to Máté Szabó, Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, requesting the initiation of an *ex post* review of the Constitutional Court of Hungary related to Act CCIII of 2011 on the Election of Members of Parliament.³⁸ Section 12 of this act paradoxically vests the *exclusive* right in the national minority self-governments elected in 2010 to set up a national list. This means—particularly in the case of Roma minority self-government—that a national minority organization, such as Lungo Drom currently, will actually function as a party in the form of a one-party system. It will have the right to identify the personal composition of the list in light of its organizational right to designate candidates. In this fashion, electors representing differing opinions will be deprived of their right to vote in free and fair elections. In their letter to Máté Szabó, the opposition leadership group contends that

the present legislation violates the principle of respect for pluralistic democracy within minority communities. As a consequence, it is prejudicial for that part of minority electors who do not want to “select from one” and who will be compelled to abstain from voting. This can lead to a serious deficit of democracy and a conflict of authenticity.

An even more serious anomaly is the legal restriction in voting for the party list by registered minority electors. A particularly essential issue in the case of the Roma/Gypsy minority is the need to make use of almost the only political right by voting for parties. To have a say through the voting right in the elections basically determining the composition of parliament and administration means decisions of politics and power guaranteeing or denying the physical and social security of the minority. (If the Roma/Gypsies may not vote for parties, those fighting for power will not be urged to present real and deep-rooted political platforms for Roma/Gypsy electors).

It is particularly special that while the Fundamental Law and the ruling Hungarian elite opens the possibility for voting for parties by electors living outside Hungary, the same right is excluded in a discriminatory way for domestic minorities.

This protest illustrates the way in which Roma political participation has been captured by ruling forces in Hungary, confined to a system of minority representation that deprives them of the right to vote and participate in the mainstream political process. Remarkably, this ghettoized political model has been advocated by various Hungarian governments not only for adoption in the postcommunist region, where significant number of Hungarian minorities live, but also in other EU countries.

Based on my interviews with Roma activists, the triumph of Roma minority self-government was seen as the negative milestone in their political activism. Due to their criticism, the most progressive Romani, unsurprisingly, became negatively labeled and marginalized in the political arena. The Hungarian state and political parties favor those who tacitly fulfill their expectations and strengthen their stereotypes about Roma people. Usually these are the Roma interest groups that support the monopolization of the system by Roma minority self-government.

Disillusionment in Human-rights Entrepreneurship

In the mid-1990s, the progressive opposition and marginalized Roma activists began to lose their political power, which gave rise to crises of leadership inside their group.³⁹ While in the early 1990s the Roma Parliament, along with Brotherhood members Jenő Zsigó, Aladár Horváth, Ágnes Daróczi, and Béla Osztójkán, was unified in its mission to fight for Roma rights—albeit through a variety of different political strategies and personal ideologies—by the middle of the decade, both groups had fractured and created new alliances.

Later, Aladár Horváth founded the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, which became the cornerstone of the institutionalization of Hungarian Roma civil-rights activism.

In fact, the earlier unity gradually faded as internal differences became irreconcilable. As noted by Roma women's activist Blanka Kozma, the first democratically elected government under the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) party supported the pro-statist Roma political group *Lungo Drom*, while at the same time, the Roma Parliament (originally created by the Brotherhood) itself weakened as a result of internal conflicts and political divisions among activists.⁴⁰

By the mid-1990s, some Roma intellectuals working within the NGO sector were frustrated with their fragile social and political position and became irritated by the power and resources under the control of non-Roma advocates within Roma NGO circles. Once again, Roma leadership became increasingly marginalized within the Hungarian political arena. In interviews with several progressive Roma activists, such as Blanka Kozma, Ágnes Daróczi, and Aladár Horváth, as well as in their personal writing, I observed a sense of resignation, resentment, and frustration, both toward the Hungarian state and toward elite human-rights organizations such as the ERRC.

I remember that in 2000 the ERRC organized a Roma-rights day at the Central European University. At that time, I was working at the ERRC with a couple of other people who were very critical to our own organization, such as my colleague Nidhi Trehan.

The majority of the people who were asked to give their views on the future of the movement were non-Roma experts. Aladár Horváth gave a very harsh critique of the non-Roma-led human-rights entrepreneurship.⁴¹ He also emphasized the danger of dependency that the Roma-rights movement faces today, a dependency not only on foreign aid, but also on control by the non-Roma elite within the movement itself.

He quoted Malcolm X to illustrate the situation: “‘If you drink coffee which is too strong, too black, what do you do with it? Well, you put some cream . . . But if you put too much cream, it no longer tastes like coffee.’ This is a lesson from the Black civil rights movement, which offers us a strong critique of black integration.”

To this day, the internal tension in civic and political activism among Roma and non-Roma leadership awaits honest discussion. The best independent Roma leaders have been marginalized and dispersed in a way that closely resembles how the overarching Hungarian state split, weakened, and ultimately gained control of their formerly lively and autonomous organizations.

Most of the time, people are looking for a “Roma Martin Luther King” who will unite the Romani and represent their voices unanimously in the

political discourse. However, we do not want to face the fact that there were and are several Roma Martin Luther Kings whose voices are silenced, whose activities are not supported, whose characters are attacked, and whose power is delegitimized not just by the visible anti-Roma political forces but also lack of support even from the progressive political elite.

Conclusion

For Romani living in Hungary, the initial promise of the postcommunist era has faded into disappointment, disillusionment, and further economic, social and political disenfranchisement. The early hopes of a burgeoning pluralistic Roma political movement, guided by a growing transnational Roma politics and undergirded by the emergent political consciousness among Romani and their progressive, liberal non-Roma allies, have been largely abandoned. They have been weakened by internal chasms exacerbated by bickering and infighting between Roma activists and the political elite. They have been destabilized by external divisions among non-Roma political and civil-society allies who—encouraged by the narrative of neo-liberal economics and its accompanying political structures—have become divided in their approach to and support of Roma integration. This politics of dispossession has become a self-feeding cycle, further miring Romani in poverty and economic and social marginalization. As the neo-liberal economic order and Hungarian right-wing crony capitalists further dismantle social safety nets that might help integrate Romani, alleviate their dire poverty, and engage them in political processes and legitimate markets, Romani see the few options they once had dwindle into ever-narrowing prospects dominated by extreme poverty with an overreliance on black markets and petty crime as modes of survival. In turn, mainstream Hungarian society eagerly buys into the perception sold to them by the system and increasingly view Romani as the sole cause of their own misery, obstinately refusing either integration or the “generous” assistance of the state. In this climate, the state-sanctioned minority self-governments operate as political monopolies—miniature puppet regimes that further disenfranchise Romani from one of the only avenues of political participation they have. Again, this dynamic of sanctioning, by an openly hostile Hungarian government, a sole political outlet for the entire Roma population feeds into the cycle of political dispossession and deepens the perception of Romani as politically (and socially) disposable. These factors intersect to promote a perception that Romani are less than

human—socially, politically, and culturally—and this both bolsters and is used as justification for growing anti-Roma rhetoric and violence.

The only viable challenge to this perception is to confront the political dispossession (1) by introducing the historical and contemporary structural discrimination and violence into the broader discourse, (2) by beginning to raise awareness among non-Roma Hungarians of the complexity of the issues that intersect to marginalize the Roma people, and (3) by examining and challenging the motives behind the proponents of the neo-liberal economic and conservative social policies. Finally, much work must be done to begin earnestly engaging non-Roma in difficult conversations that explore mainstream society's complicity in, if not contribution to, the situation of the Roma people in Hungary today.

I am indebted to Natasha Lamoreux for her generous constructive comments and advice on this chapter.

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CHAPTER 7

Timike and the Sweetie Pies: Fragmented Discourses about Women in Hungarian Public Life

Ágnes Kövér

In this chapter, I deal with discourses which overtly or covertly encompass aspects of womanhood and femininity, and seek to illuminate the power of discourses constructing women and femininity in the Hungarian public mindset. Talk about women and gender issues is accepted in Hungarian society, although questions of the suppression of women or claims acknowledging feminine ways of viewing the world are not often welcomed. Conversations about masculinity meet with similar resistance, indicating the interrelated and complementary natures of these issues. The social image of women could hardly be redesigned or reconstructed without restructuring or reconstructing the social icon of man and masculinity, although the recent transformation of gender roles is also biased, reflecting an unequal acceptance of these changes: while the image of the tender father's masculinity receives great support, the figure of the career-seeking working woman more often than not meets with disapproval.¹

Locating Discourses

Discourses about femininity are to be found in different fields² that are quite detached from one another (sometimes with no communication between them) with flourishing one-sided narratives and processes of truth production. These narratives deal with different ways of living, and their purpose, acknowledged or unacknowledged, is intrusion into the lives of women.

Notwithstanding, discourses in one field often reflect or distort, and sometimes abuse or ignore, those in other areas of life. For example, so-

cial scientists often take the agenda of working women and its implications as the subject of research and analysis. Their findings, however, are from time to time reflected, or distorted, by the media; are applied, or more typically ignored, in political discussions and legislation; and feature repeatedly in the statements of women's rights organizations. On these issues, those aspiring to political power show little capacity to listen and understand any voices other than their own.

Modes and conceptualizations of femininity and gender emerge as radically different from field to field. The voices of women's rights organizations, for example, most resemble "newcomers"³ who would like to break into public arenas in order to shape notions about womanhood, reinterpret gender relations, and fight gender inequality. These arenas are typically dominated by often manipulative political narratives. Public discourses are defined by these dominating forces, which produce meaning, substance, and boundaries of the women's agenda, determining which conversations, approaches, and speakers are considered legitimate or illegitimate. The dominant political field that sprang from the domination of the former centralized state meets with a weak civil society that it often shapes and controls by swallowing alternative voices and ways of thinking into its "black hole." The sharper the political contrast between the parties, the stronger the demand to unite under one of the emblematic banners, a process which counters democratic pluralities and drastically limits refined ways of openly thinking and discussing issues of gender.

Gender as issue and agenda typically remains unrecognized by the governing elite, and its discussions employ terminology that frames gender concerns as undesirable and illegitimate. From time to time, powerful figures make expressive verbal statements labeling gender concerns as dangerous ideologies that undermine human decency and values.⁴ On the other hand, women's issues are highly thematized in myriad ways which disparage and insult women, or in other cases "only" colonize and subjugate them. In addition, no powerful figures rise in objection to the demeaning and sometimes disgusting comments addressed to women MPs by their male colleagues in parliament.

Political Discourses at Large

Thematizing the women's agenda involves delineating the circle of issues and approaches that are deemed legitimate and acceptable by the field. Parliamentary discourses on the field of politics and legislation thematize femininity in the context of the family agenda, capturing women as as-

signed caregivers, housekeepers, and the key actors responsible for the demographic crisis. Debates and discussions take place, and provisions and legislation on these issues are created without the participation of those most centrally affected and involved. Although significant differences exist between the rhetoric and policies of the right and the left, neither of these political sides finds itself able to promote policies that enhance women's representation in political life, including in parliamentary decision making. Even in the very narrow constituency of their own parties, major political actors do not stand up for equal opportunities for women as candidates in the party lists.⁵ The composition of these lists, especially the order of candidates, is highly arbitrary and ignores minimum rules of gender equality.

However, the darkest side of the discourse surrounding women, family, and childbearing is the ethnicity- and class-based narrative in which patriarchy, suppression by the majority, and wealth-based privilege intersect, producing the notion of "welfare childbearing," an approach overtly directed against the poor, particularly the "excessively" large Roma families. The right-wing conception of welfare childbearing suggests that the poorest families—with Romani highly represented in this category—bear and raise children for the sake of accumulating welfare benefits, which admittedly form the largest source of income for many families. The considerable anxiety on the part of the "fathers of the nation" in the face of the low fertility rate does not apply in this case, because the production of children among the poor and unemployed is not welcomed. The labeling expression of welfare childbearing figured strongly in the public vocabulary and discourse and is highly common in different forums supported by Fidesz and the Christian Democrats on the center-right and by Jobbik on the far right. The latter initiated a parliamentary debate in 2011, for example, about how to eliminate the phenomenon of welfare childbearing and regulate families who habitually take advantage of the "generosity of the worthy society" without making any useful contribution. In contrast to the effect of equalization of child benefits, family policies in the form of tax deduction provisions convey inherent ethnic and class preferences and biases, indicating generosity for children born in typical non-Roma, middle-class families, with an employed paterfamilias. Conversely, "workfare" policies restrict and control the unemployed, the poor, and Romani, all otherwise considered unworthy parasites thriving on welfare benefits.

This well-known discourse of blaming the victim is easy. We all know that it is so much easier to blame, punish, and control those who are in trouble, voiceless, and weak and force them to defend themselves than it

is to understand and change the underlying economic and social foundation of undesirable phenomena and look at them as symptoms of desperate poverty, helplessness, and lack of opportunity.

Women's Participation in Political Life: The Discourses of the Three Quota Attempts

The rate of women's participation in national and local political decision-making and executive power clearly communicates the imbalance of power between the genders. Prior to the political transition, 30 percent of MPs were women, but that number dropped dramatically to 7–8 percent after the first free elections, sharply illuminating the scarcity of political capital that women were able to accumulate during the era of state socialism.

This low participation rate of women in national decision-making places Hungary in second-last place in the ranking of European countries. Furthermore, most women in parliament were selected from party lists; very few were elected from individual constituencies—and these few belong to Fidesz. An MP who is chosen directly by voters of an individual constituency is considered to be more legitimate than one selected from a party list. Nevertheless, sponsoring a candidate in an individual constituency demands considerably more resources and effort than the party list method, which only actually shows the party's preference. None of the main parties, except Politics Can Be Different (LMP), invested considerable attention and resources into campaigns for women as individual candidates. Although the number of women candidates has been continuously increasing since the political transition,⁶ most of the women were relegated to the bottom fifty spaces on the party lists, where there is no chance to win seats; this clearly illustrates the placeholder role that is assigned to women.⁷

A similar process can be seen in local power relations as well. Only 18 percent of mayors are women, and their distribution also reflects the significance of their settlements. The lowest number of women candidates is found in the districts of the capital city, Budapest. Data show that the strategically least important settlements—poorly funded, small, disadvantaged villages—have much higher probabilities of being led by women.⁸ On the other hand, the apparently more capable and worthier male political actors eagerly accumulate mandates, securing the most powerful mayoral positions and parliamentary seats. The rate of mandate accumulators

in the reigning Fidesz majority is 57 percent,⁹ illustrating an obvious colonization of political life.

The “women’s place is in the kitchen” attitude is evident in the acute resistance to all attempts directly intended to alter this picture. To borrow a phrase from soccer, a symbol of masculinity, we can say Hungary, 3; Women’s quota, 0.

The first attempt was initiated in 2007 by MPs from the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) who proposed a bill that, on the one hand, suggested that representation of both sexes in executive power should be at least one third and, on the other hand, suggested that the party lists of MP candidates be composed in such a fashion as to provide equal chances for women. It was proposed that a male candidate must be followed by a female candidate on the party list.

Discourses emerged around the quota agenda of women’s participation in political life and womanhood, illuminating the interweaving forces of pervasive masculine domination and the weight of false women’s consciousness. Political actors, including women MPs, reached the conclusion that the selection of candidates should be based exclusively on aptitude and not gender. Thus, the original concept of the quota has been distorted, and its simple aim—to remedy women’s historical exclusion from the political field—has become neglected.

However, the reasoning of the proquota and antiquota actors is worth recalling. The proquota conversation typically had to do with the newcomers’ weak position, although the main political parties’ rhetoric at this time supported the idea. Their arguments were well documented by international comparisons and data indicating Hungary’s backward position among developed countries. These statements viewed the underrepresentation of women as a democratic deficit and argued that quotas should be seen as a temporary tool for the elimination of systematic and firm inequality, thus providing a social remedy for excessive gender and other social biases.

The opponents of quotas obviously could not support their reasoning with international data comparisons, since this would associate Hungary with a segment of the world it seeks to escape—the underdeveloped countries. Nevertheless, the power of merit-based discourse proved highly effective. Even the women MPs of the party proposing the bill stressed that they did not want to be “quota women,” which showed both a misunderstanding of the quota idea and at the same time how deeply women can become trapped by the masculine, patriarchal mindset and reasoning. In this mindset, the label of quota woman undermines merit- and worthiness-

based views of a woman's achievements and portrays her as a unique winner of a masculine game.

Other women MPs saw the nonorganic, top-down nature of the quota as counterproductive, thereby failing to understand the nature of the reigning "organic" arrangement of power. These examples elucidate the harmful character of patriarchal discourse, which has the ability to convince women who are victimized by male domination to support the prevailing system and see it as a good.

Some of the male candidates feared the increasing prejudices that women from the quota might face, arguing that free elections and a *sui generis* parliament guarantee the political freedom and the equality of citizens—an argument that does not recognize the falseness of formal equality. Other gatekeepers expressed fears of party failure if larger numbers of female candidates figured on the lists. They argued that while every third listed male candidate is elected, only every fifth female is successful. This analysis blurs that fact that only 10 percent of candidates are women, so the selection tends to be made long before the voters' decision.¹⁰

Typical male opinions frame election campaigns as a masculine, and even warlike, competitive sport, where no opponent is positively affirmed. This approach forces women into an arena which is not known and not preferred by them, and serves the function of discouraging and keeping them away from this rough "sport"—often proving successful in its aim.

The second quota attempt was in 2010, when a civic organization¹¹ initiated a campaign to collect the necessary number of citizens' signatures in order to submit quota as a referendum question. The visuals of the campaign depicted naked well-known males next to fully dressed but also well-known women on huge billboards placed all over the city and the country. The purpose of this visual effect was clear, namely to produce the opposite perspective of the pervasive and traditional depiction of fully dressed males with naked women. Unfortunately, the effort to reverse the traditional view of male-female relations proved unsuccessful, and the campaign resulted in a level of indignation welcomed by traditionalist political actors. Ultimately, the intellectual polemics—often dressing patriarchy in the clothes of legal science and the rule of law—became exhausted, and the campaign came up against claims about the illegitimacy of forcing the referendum by the collection of signatures, a process labeled as antidemocratic and harmful.¹² The number of signatures ended up amounting to less than the half of the legally required 200,000 by the end of the period given for the collection under the law.

The third attempt, in 2011, was initiated by two MPs who submitted an amendment to the law on general elections, suggesting that “if on the party list of candidates two consecutive places are taken by one of the sexes, and then the third place must be given to a member of the other sex.”¹³

This amendment, though it was a clever solution, was supported neither by the left nor by the right. This unanimous resistance was highly supported by most of the women MPs, again with the same reasoning: they did not want to be quota women.¹⁴ The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) would have been supportive of the bill if Fidesz had also supported it, but its members did not find it politically expedient to nurture a bill in cooperation with the far-right Jobbik party.¹⁵ Finally, Jobbik abandoned the bill as well, leaving it to be addressed solely by LMP.

The only notable event of this third round was a day of parliamentary debate initiated by LMP representative Katalin Ertsey with the anticipation of opening up an enriching discourse. However, this was yet another instance proving how difficult it is for new voices to break into and transform established masculine discourse and power relations.

The secretary of state for social affairs set the boundaries and the main tone of the discussion when he argued in his opening speech that society needs to help women fulfill their dual function. This approach assumes that if “society” includes only males, only women would be required to serve a dual function: an occupation in the world of labor and a family career as mother and housekeeper at home. The hidden content of this statement depicts males as having an insignificant parental role and being only secondary actors in their homes.

This salient incapacity to conceptualize the roles and functions of women and men as equal characterized the whole day of debate. All speakers asserted the total inappropriateness of the women’s quota, saying that quota is only a technical solution and does not help improve women’s position in the labor market or in the demographic crisis, provide more child care institutions, etc. These speeches made very clear that there is a whole long list of issues that are found to be much more important than women’s entry into the decision-making process, and that these concerns will not be solved by means of introducing the quota. We cannot expect quotas to solve all social problems and bring about world peace, but on the other hand, political participation at least would give more voices to women to represent their interests and shape the social conditions of their lives accordingly.

The female Fidesz MPs found it more important to recalibrate the balance between work and family than to impose the quota. They also as-

sented that, in the current Hungarian situation, the issue of women's political and public participation is not particularly important. KDNP members spoke of maintaining the "natural boundaries" between the sexes and framed women's dignity in terms of family servitude. Finally Jobbik, originally one of the initiators of the bill, asserted that the best profession for women is that of mother and that a quota must remain merit based. The only alternative opinions were provided by the MSZP, which otherwise did not support the bill, and LMP.

In his closing remarks, the representative of the Ministry of National Resources reinforced and certified the underlying message of the debate day, saying that balancing work and family life is inevitable, since the solution of the demographic issues is not imaginable without it. This final cue once again illuminates the old/new conception of womanhood and femininity.

To recap the two major messages of this debate day: one is that political games are more important than identifying and resolving substantial thematized issues; the second is that official political and governmental actors overtly frame the family issue exclusively as a women's issue, thereby putting it into the context of traditional family, motherhood, and demographic concerns.

The Fundamental Law

It is a fascinating question as to how the new Fundamental Law constructs gender and womanhood, masculinity and family. There was endless discussion, propaganda, and criticism of the value system underlying the Fundamental Law, which excluded alternative ways of living and constructing gender¹⁶ and represented a typical patriarchal way of thinking and talking. The critical voices of the new Fundamental Law were not loud enough, since the Hungarian media are almost fully controlled by the governing party coalition; therefore, there is little chance to reach a wider public. Also, the vocabulary and legal arguments of the counterdiscourse are far more complicated for everyday understanding, particularly when compared to the simplified messages the Fundamental Law presents on familiar, deeply rooted subjects.¹⁷

I will focus on one of the less discussed provisions of the Fundamental Law, which deals with the obligations of progeny to care for needy parents.¹⁸ This provision was discussed by the media recently when a rural elderly home for the elderly sued the children of one of its residents to cover the costs of her care.¹⁹

I share János Kis's opinion that adult progeny have a moral obligation to care for their needy parents. However, I also contend that this obligation should not be included in the constitution, since the relation between independent private citizens living in separate households is not a proper concern of the state.²⁰

The above-mentioned court case primarily had to do with the financial obligations of the children, but caring for elderly parents or other family members often includes physical caregiving as well, and accordingly is generally considered to be exclusively a female function. The consequent application of this constitutional obligation involves assigning tasks for women that are interpreted in the context of unpaid work and family services. As a matter of fact, in Hungary, 70–90 percent of caregiving activities are provided by women as unpaid work. After Poland, the rate of care given in patients' homes by a family member is highest in Hungary (67 percent), while the care given in the home by professional caregivers is the lowest (7 percent) (and a very low 6 percent is supplied by paid caregivers in Hungary). To grasp the meaning of these data, compare Hungary to Denmark, where the rate of care given in the home by a family member is 20 percent, that given by a professional caregiver in the home is 46 percent, and that given by paid caregivers in the home is 22 percent. These preferences are not based on attitudes but rather on the available opportunities.²¹

If we thoroughly consider the consequences of this constitutional obligation, we may then find women irrevocably trapped in their homes even after their children have left, with no escape from this servitude. This post-child-rearing phase of women's life thus may obligate them to yet another extensive caring job that ultimately limits many prospects in later life. Even in the traditional patriarchal Western lifestyle, which can be traced back to the 1950s, women could take advantage of many opportunities to contribute to community life, to volunteer in their church, etc. after their children left home.

At the same time, a sort of enhanced and declared means of shared responsibility could be identified in this provision, which induces and foreshadows a coming withdrawal of public and community resources by the government from the field of elder care systems. This brings to mind the "innovative" rearrangement of the pension system as an ultimate concern, especially if we take into consideration the increasing gap between the input and the output of the pension fund, generated as it is by the growing number of elderly people who are living longer, and the decreasing number of people in younger generations, with their declining chances for employment.

The declared shared responsibility limits the state's obligations arising from the constitutional right of social security and human dignity with respect to the elderly; the responsibility is offloaded to families. And we know family in this context means relying on services provided by women.

If the Fundamental Law favors family-based elder care, this means that most caregiving will be informal and nonprofessional. Are we aware of the consequences of this? A number of questions arise: To what extent will such services be recognized by the law? What about the working time discount for those who are employed and must provide these services? Is there a plan for their financial support? Who will care for the caregivers, and how? Who will be responsible for their professionalism, and how? Will elder care be recognized by the law on the basis of retirement? What degree of social respect and prestige will this activity be given? (Presumably, not much higher than most other unpaid work.) The current regulations for family caregiving have something of a social benefit character, but this is far from providing sufficient recognition and support for those who claim it. Are we ready to acknowledge family caregiving as employment, which otherwise would enhance the professional level of caring and would require a conscious approach to the physical and psychological consequences of care activities?

Additionally, what opportunities will people have to buy care services on the market? Are there enough service provider organizations, and what state support is available for using these opportunities? Or do we start moving our system toward a market-based elder-care scheme? All these questions and many more cry out for answer in consideration of this constitutional provision.

Reflections of Femininity in Legislation in Recent Decades

1. Discourse on legally permitted rape, 1997

The 1997 amendment of the section regarding sexual rape in the Criminal Code dramatically spotlighted what was on people's minds during and after the state socialist period regarding women's roles, rights, and obligations.

The purpose of the bill was to revise the legal description of rape, which was literally permitted if committed within the bounds of matrimony.²² This view was based on a concept of marriage that held that sex-

ual intercourse is one of the obligations of women to serve their husbands' needs. Therefore, if a wife failed to meet this obligation and her husband forcibly compelled her, there was no legal investigation; rape was effectively legal.

The amendment replaced language that had been in effect since 1978 with a version that leaves out of consideration the legal relationship between the victim and the offender. In 1997, the direction of the parliamentary discourse was to change or retain this regulation. Out of 45 parliamentary speeches, 5 were in support of the bill (MPs of the governing MSZP, including the minister who presented the bill) while two MPs of the governing party were among the 40 who opposed it.

A representative of the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP) held that the amendment was a "suffragette vision," which is not allowed under the Hungarian conditions.²³ According to another speaker from the same party, this offence has such low weight that the punishment should be much more lenient than in cases of other rape.²⁴

Legal reasoning was used to rationalize: it would be difficult to give evidence of the violence that occurs in cohabitation;²⁵ one of the women lawyer MPs of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) asserted that this provision gives inappropriate power to married women, who might abuse this power by falsely testifying against their husbands.²⁶

The lack of a social need for changing this provision was another reason.²⁷ Some speakers found that the value of privacy and the intimacy of family life needed to be protected and therefore were jeopardized by the intrusion of criminal procedure.²⁸ Ultimately, according to the most fanciful reasoning, women essentially like to be forced into sexual intercourse: "I would ask the Honorable House to comply with the social expectations of society. Is not one of the most important issues whether within marriage a husband approaches his wife in a legally permitted way, and when he approaches beyond the legal limits and forces his wife—I cannot make assertions on behalf of the women [Dr. Avarkeszi Dezső: Please, just do it!], but I suppose that a very significant proportion of women would not even mind [sporadic laughter], if a husband approached them a bit violently—so please, do not consider these invented excuses, but focus on the real problems and the real protection of society."²⁹

Statements such as these clearly indicate how the political elite of Hungarian society in the second half of 1990s thought about gender, family, marriage, and the obligations and rights of the parties. The bill was finally passed by the majority votes of the governing party, but opinions showed that, even in that party, MPs voted in favor mostly because of

party discipline. It is no accident that only 5 speeches were made in favor of the bill, compared to roughly 40 against it.

During the discussion, the parties' statements predominantly targeted people who shared the same opinion, which constituted one-sided narratives rather than real discourse or dialogue about family, gender, etc. Efforts to clarify and give meaning to the above concepts were entirely missing, illuminating the true nature of this discourse, which was not about family and women, nor was it even about rape and violence. Others presented clear maintenance of the status quo. In place of genuine discourse, we find overt "power speech" cloaked in rationalization.

2. Discourse on domestic violence: 2010 to 2013

In order to have domestic violence included in the Criminal Code of Hungary, an NGO called the Life Value Foundation initiated the collection of citizens' signatures in 2010. The independent citizens' initiative failed, accumulating only 49,375 signatures instead of the legally prescribed 50,000. This attempt was repeated jointly with other women's rights organizations in 2012; the success legally obligated parliament to add this issue to the parliamentary agenda.

According to the agenda, this topic was to be discussed in the opening of the autumn session of parliament at 3:00 a.m., because "domestic violence does not have enough weight to call greater attention."³⁰ The debate eventually took place, ultimately including the formerly well-known reasoning from earlier decades. The MPs of the governing party (Fidesz) spoke "specifically of the madness of putting this disposition into the code,"³¹ which they contended would be hard to support with evidence and would then be abused by women using it as a tool against men. The most "convincing" argument stated that, contrary to criminalizing domestic violence, we "maybe should restore the rank and the role of the family, and of childbearing. Maybe mothers should return mainly to raising children and we should care in this society whether women bear not one or two, but three, four, or five children. And it would make sense then to respect each other [women] better, and the issue of domestic violence would not come into the picture at all."³² As if women would be beaten because they do not give birth often enough! Or as if women with several children would not be harassed! As if it were women's fault that they are beaten.³³

On the other hand, it must not be easy to make a law against domestic violence in an atmosphere where the governing party's representatives

occasionally fall under suspicion of spousal abuse themselves. Only one case, that of József Balogh, will be mentioned here. This MP was subjected to criminal prosecution after contending that his wife's injuries occurred "when she got out of their car and tripped over their blind sheep-dog."³⁴ Balogh was finally forced to leave his party's parliamentary group when parliament suspended his immunity. But it is still interesting to note what other party members had to say about this case. János Lázár, one of the most influential personalities of Fidesz, and currently the vice-president of the party, said in a radio interview, "the party has nothing to do with its members' domestic behavior."³⁵

Ultimately, after almost a year of tolerance, József Balogh's party membership³⁶ was withdrawn as a result of a successful demonstration by women MPs in parliament, who marched silently with fake injuries on their face and black eye makeup in November 2013. Finally, the provision was passed in a new form which framed it as relational violence, not family violence,³⁷ due to the governing parties' objections to the use of the word *family* in the context of violence.

3. The multiple rounds of the abortion debate

The topic of abortion is raised again and again in public and parliamentary discourse, where the representatives of power make recurrent attempts to confine women's rights to self-determination on the grounds of reversing the national decline, protecting life, and avoiding reckless sexual behavior. The abortion agenda is not an easy issue in any country and is especially complex in Central and Eastern Europe, where narratives of new religiosity and traditionalism have become reinforced after the political transition. The abortion discourse is another typical representation of a power-dominated conversation and, so far, not a gender or women's issue. Women are only subjects within this male-controlled issue. Women are typically implicated in this discourse, but exclusively as actors in a context in which they are blamed and attributed the sole responsibility for the unwanted conception. They are depicted as monsters who jeopardize and ultimately abort the fetus's life.

One of the latest controversies on this topic was in 1999–2000, when the amendment to Act LXXIX of 1992 on the Protection of Fetal Life³⁸ was discussed in parliament.³⁹ It was presented by the left-liberal party's female representatives, who sought to reframe the issue and place the responsibility for unwanted conceptions on both sexes. Opposition parties (Fidesz, KDNP) expressed hostile opinions toward abortion, exclusively

through male speakers, since the women representatives of these parties did not want to represent the decision made by the male-dominated party. On the antiabortion side, the most prevalent arguments exploited the fear that women would lose their capacity to give birth in the future, harsh opinions comparing women's rights to self-determination to a "death machine,"⁴⁰ and simply characterizing abortion as a false illusion of freedom.⁴¹ There were views that presented women's self-determination in a highly limited way, saying, "women's right to self-determination ends the very moment when they establish cohabitation or marriage."⁴²

This latter approach clearly sought to apply a double standard for the two sexes by subordinating women's basic rights to those of the male partner in marriage or even cohabitation. I remember learning in my history studies that this was quite natural some centuries ago.

Another awareness-raising discussion about abortion dealt with the issue of the abortion pill, which—in spite of its much gentler effects compared to surgical abortion—was not accepted in the Hungarian praxis. The usual reasoning was couched in medical arguments stating that the abortion pill is dangerous, although this has not been found to be the case in Western countries such as Austria and Germany, where their use has become prevalent in recent decades. This refusal of the pill overtly shows the extent to which the abortion debate is about exercising control over the female body. While the traditional method of surgical abortion is highly regulated by law and requires permission, the abortion pill lacks all these controls and consequently would deprive the patriarchal state of its position of power over women's bodies.

This position of power was cleverly displayed in 1999 during the case of a 13-year-old pregnant girl. After receiving a report from a local priest, an association called Alpha Alliance initiated a court case on behalf of the fetus in order to prevent the abortion. The girl, a minor, who in agreement with her legal representative mother initiated the necessary procedure for the abortion, was obstructed by the association in a legal procedure where the fetus's right to life was represented against those of the girl. This fascinating case demonstrated how a woman's own will and body could be turned against the life inside her, and finally the court permitted the abortion. The association and the priest, acting as guardians of the female's egg, were fined in another civil court proceeding pursued against them because of the infringement of the girl's personal rights and her right to privacy.

Perhaps we should not be surprised when current MPs of the ruling Fidesz-KDNP coalition in their parliamentary speeches speak of mother-

hood as the exclusive source of women's dignity.⁴³ As ruling coalition MP Péter Harrach asserted, "the most certain way of self-fulfillment for women is through motherhood."⁴⁴

It is incontestable that motherhood is extremely important in a woman's life, constituting a considerable part of her identity. In addition, the dark sides of abortion are also evident. But the ways in which this aggressive narrative obtrudes itself into Hungarian public life, and especially into the most intimate concerns of women, shows the missing capacity of the ruling parties to discuss issues with interested actors on the equal bases of dialogue and respect. The party's misuse of power is illuminated by its discourse, which creates a distorted reality that excludes the diversity of life and its dissident claims, and that shows no willingness at all to conceptualize the variety of women's needs, desires, and perspectives.

Out of Agenda: Additives to Political Talks in and out of Parliament

Disparaging and condescending manners and overt sexism are quite prevalent among the representatives of so-called traditional values who concentrate around the governing parties. Their quips usually attack female political actors on the basis of their femininity, characterizing them primarily as women and not as political representatives. Such statements have to do with female representatives' sexuality, not on the substance they intend to express. This demotion from the political role also demeans the human dignity of the female being addressed. I will present only some of these "gems," which depict the general atmosphere and ways of speaking found in the current parliamentary cycle.

"If you weren't a Gypsy, I would poke you." This "compliment" was addressed to Ágnes Osztolykán, an MP of Roma origin, in the corridors of parliament by György Gyula Zagyva, a Jobbik MP.

"Why do you bark at this, sweetie pie?" László Tasó (Fidesz) made this note in parliament to calm Tímea Szabó when she requested that he and other Fidesz MPs not yowl during the speech of an LMP MP.

Zoltán Illés (Fidesz) said the following to Bernadett Szél (LMP): "The fact that you are beautiful does not mean that you are smart. . . . I have to refute all those silly and stupid things you said in the last five minutes." Does this sound like a debate based on mutual respect and the strength of the best argument?

Tímea Szabó (LMP) was depicted by Tamás Deutch (Fidesz's member of the European Parliament) as "Timike, the political bluestocking on duty

who shows her muscular biceps” after she gave a press conference. This implies a detractive, patriarchal, and condescending approach.

Tamás Deutch’s other remarks, considered (at least by him) as trendy, often have a similarly insulting edge. In one of his interviews, he measures his female party and political colleagues in terms of what “hot girls” they are, and qualifies his party mate Gabriella Selmeczi as a “hot girl.” This “funny” guy unwittingly demonstrates a patriarchal manner of talking in which women’s bodies are referred to sexually in sexually neutral situations where women play important public roles. This “sexualization of women’s bodies”⁴⁵ conveys the message of male superiority to the world: although you are present in politics and try to play your serious role, you are just women who can be fucked with and weighed by us, just like a piece of meat.

Closing Discussion with an Eye on Media Reflections

It is worth paying attention to how the examples above echo through the media to see how “they are conveyed and related to in the eyes of the public.” If we survey media reflections of overtly sexist political remarks, we observe approaches that depict them as scandalous in order to increase the number of copies sold, emphasizing them as a joke. Some just report them without comment, while others play the political opposition card. But one rarely observes articulate rejections from either the wider public or from the media’s “moral guardians,” who generally seem eager to attack the gender view. Numerous blogs provide wider coverage and reflections on these sexist statements, but we must note that the supportive views are sometimes more prevalent than the critical voices.

Mass media serve as powerful tools of publicity while at the same time shaping public views; they are clearly a space for seeking and changing definitions. The government-controlled Hungarian media uncritically convey the officially and centrally constructed model of women—the notion of family, mother, and wife—while the tabloid media play the uncontrolled, subconscious role of providing the dirty, flashy side of the game. These actors rarely fail to take the overtly biased masculine perspective that serves to maintain the existing power relations in the family and in society; they thereby firmly protect the sexual privileges which allow the shaping of women’s image as sexual objects for the gratification of men’s fantasies.

Women are highly underrepresented in the media, from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.⁴⁶ Not only are there fewer articles and

themes about women, but those that do exist also tend to be very biased, depicting women in only certain roles and situations. The target reader is the male, whose taste is viewed as the measure of news, even when it primarily is concerned with “women’s topics.” The relevant women’s issues are rarely analyzed and redefined in any successful manner. Analyses of health, employment, career, and personal experience are marginalized in favor of traditional topics such as cooking, child care, and spicy sexual stories.⁴⁷

The hidden (but sometimes very obvious) messages of these spicy stories tend to be tendentious, expressing typical male-dominated narratives about relationships. One of the telling examples is the Lázár Kovács⁴⁸ case, which demonstrates the competitive context, referring to gender mates as part of a struggle or fight for the opposite sex. In this context, the better one is seen as meeting the presumed or real expectations of the opposite sex, while the more successful one is seen to be in the relationship market. Women are seen to be motivated to live up to male views and expectations, and enter into competition with one another. The underlying concept is the acceptance of female inferiority—and therefore the need to fight for the superior male. In the Lázár Kovács case, the hidden mistress and the legal wife competed with each other, not just as women but also as mothers, both having a child of the same father. The media depicted the case as a fight between the two women, discussing and assessing which had more of a right to claim the man, himself portrayed as suffering in anguish because of these two women. Finally, the mistress (as whispered by Kovács’s lawyers) was described as someone who endangered the family’s harmony. She was accused of using her child—conceived deceptively by the guy, who promised his young mistress that he would indeed leave his marriage—as a weapon in this battle.

From this reading of the facts, the message was very clear: in this game, women can only be losers, since only one will be selected while the other is rejected and neglected.

The list of similar cases is long, but the common features of masculine bias can still be identified. The image of the independent, strong woman who is able to make her own decisions and who is ready and fully equipped to participate in public life threatens the Hungarian male, who seems unable to construct himself without holding a position of power over the subordinated woman. Hearing and reading media reports, as well as researching significant women politicians’ image in media, supports this impression. Female public actors have been largely ignored by the media. Women are rarely given a voice on air or in print, either as opinion shapers or as ex-

perts, even in cases where their qualifications are clear and confirmed. The principle of objective public information does not cover women politicians; they are crowded out of the notion of objectivity.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the stronger women characters (where “stronger” means more significant than the role acknowledged and permitted by the dominant male power) must endure consequences ranging from dishonor to slander. A favorite target is Ágnes Vadai, an MP who was accused of falsifying history, who was labeled a liar, and whose private life was attacked in connection with her husband, a love affair being assumed between her and a former prime minister. Her website was investigated by the police and was banned. Both as a woman and for her appearance, she was personally insulted and criticized in humiliating ways on many occasions.

Other women politicians were negatively depicted as well: Ibolya Dávid, former minister of justice, was subjected to sexist criticism from the center-right media after expressing her disagreement with the mainstream political right. Ildikó Lendvai, the former leader of the MSZP parliamentary group, was called a “cawing crow” in a highly sardonic text.

Sometimes women experts have to share similar offense. Kim Lane Scheppelle, internationally known constitutional lawyer and one of the contributors to this book, criticized the Fundamental Law in 2012 and was subsequently attacked and ridiculed by the government-controlled media. Various blogs and websites not known for the quality of their professional arguments labeled her “ugly,” accompanying their words in one case with a caricature depicting her in a bikini in front of a mirror. Scheppelle appears as Jabba the Hutt, the gangster from the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

These and the previous remarks illustrate the astoundingly low level of tolerance toward women who express opinions and thoughts that deviate from the official orthodox way of thinking. This form of uncontrolled masculine power is deeply disrespectful of women and in no way accepts them as having a role in the political sphere, especially when positioned on the opposing side.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to introduce the reader to a specific angle of discourse on the relevant issues of femininity and womanhood in Hungary. This discourse is situated in a central and powerful field of knowledge production and truth narrative: that of politics and parliamentary decision making.

It is a frequent finding of attitude studies that Hungarian women are traditional in their ways; they are family-centered in their lives and voluntarily avoid public life. On the other hand, very little research has sought to explore the economic and social foundations of these attitudes.⁵⁰ Imre Kovách describes three distinct types of discourse that all indicate a new reinforcement of the family as an economic institution;⁵¹ at the same time, all these approaches introduce transformed relations between the partners. Women are not willing to subordinate themselves to male decision making, yet they mostly accept (sometimes overtly) their traditional caring and homemaking role.

Hungarian society consists of different groups, ways of living, interests, expectations, claims, and capacities, and this diversity characterizes its women as well as its men. Women as a group do not occupy a single and homogenous silo in this country. Rather, as the third wave of feminism highlights, they form a group of people who are divided along the lines of many traits and characteristics (such as age, education, place in the division of labor, income, geography, race, and ethnicity) which generate differences among them. But on the other hand, there are other traits and experiences that are widely shared among them (such as motherhood, gender discrimination, exclusion, lack of power, etc.). These traits and experiences generate similarities and may serve to unify and bind them together. In the ideal case, state and government policies are sensitive enough to this manifold plurality of womanhood to be able to properly address the different needs and expectations it articulates and brings to public decisions. In the ideal case, government policies are not defined, invented, implemented, and displayed by male actors alone. In a participatory democracy, groups are enabled and expected to give voice to their own claims, and space is claimed and provided for displaying and constructing microcosms of society.

Perhaps, of course, “ideal” cases do not exist at all, for public policies seem always to lag behind in reflecting the pluralistic variety and manifold needs of the societal reality. Visions of ideal society are probably most productive when they provide leeway for individual freedom to dream up, figure out, and seek ways to implement different ways of life and the diversity of human values and aspirations.

What feminism—as politics—pursues involves a fundamental change in society’s power relations: at the day-to-day level of families, in political life and representation, in the division of labor both in the economy and in the home. Feminism generates new perspectives from which there are no dominant and no subordinated, but rather equals in a dialogue about, and

deliberation toward, new and better possibilities for living life in a time of challenge and change.

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- 3 Bourdieu, "Some Properties of Fields."
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- 15 Ibid; statement from Mónika Lamperth (MSZP).
- 16 For example, same-sex marriage is against the constitution.
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The Rise of the Radical Right in Hungary

András Tóth and István Grajczjár

In this chapter, we argue that there is a new wave of radical populist parties emerging in the crisis-ridden periphery of Europe.

It is a well-known phenomenon that radical right-wing parties are emerging in historical waves. Following the defeat of the wave of interwar fascism in postwar Europe, there were three major waves of emergence of radical right-wing parties.¹ The first wave was the establishment of neo-fascist parties just after the end of the war. The second wave consisted of antitax protest parties. The third and final wave emerged in the 1980s. The parties of the third wave were typically anti-immigrant parties who campaigned with populist slogans.

We argue that in response to the deep, long, and structural crisis of the Europeanized economic system, there is a new type of revolutionary radical right-wing party emerging in the crisis-stricken European countries. Radical right-wing parties are revolting against the open-market economy and demanding national rejuvenation based on a closed economic model with controlled capitalism under the guidance of a strong state. Jobbik, the Hungarian radical right-wing party, is typical of this new wave and perhaps its first successful representative.

We will paint a comprehensive picture of the rise of the radical right in Hungary, and of its chosen ideology of national radicalism. In the conclusion, we will also compare the Hungarian radical right with the radical right-wing parties of the third wave to establish whether one could speak of the beginnings of a new party subfamily within the broad radical party family on the right.

The Radical Right from the Regime Change to the Foundation of Jobbik

In 1989–1990, along with the regime change and regained freedom after a forty-year-long hibernation, extreme-right-wing radicalism resurfaced in Hungary. In the beginning, only small neo-Nazi-type extremist groups were formed until the folkish national wing led by István Csurka left the moderate right Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) in 1993 and established the Hungarian Life and Justice Party (MIÉP), a radical right party of national significance.

The MIÉP used nationalistic, chauvinistic, and ethnocentric themes and slogans that harked back to the 1930s. The injustice of the Treaty of Trianon, the protection of Hungarians living in the neighboring countries, the wariness toward Jews, the virtues of anticommunism, the provision of law and order, the advocacy of strict traditional conservative values, the preservation of folk traditions and conventional morals, the rejection of behavior patterns considered deviant, and the support of family-oriented Christian national values all played important roles in the party's discourse. Owing to its anti-Jewish references and ultranationalism charged with irredentist overtones, the MIÉP was quickly perceived to be an extreme-right party. Its ideology, so familiar from the 1930s, was accompanied by themes that were decidedly antiliberal, antiglobalization-oriented, and Euroskeptical. The MIÉP was the first to turn against the consensus agreed upon by the regime-changing parties that was aimed at leading Hungary into the globalized world and the European political and social system.

István Csurka, the founder, leader, and ideologist of the MIÉP, brought two major components together in a single concept: the ideas of the radical right of the 1930s and criticism of the modern globalized world. By linking the nostalgic politics of resentment with present-day grievances, Csurka created the so-called national radicalism, an “up-to-date” 21st-century version of radical right ideology. The MIÉP's universe is built around the old-new exploitative enemy: the “alien-hearted” who have been in control of globalization processes—i.e., the international circle of big business and finances, the Jews, the communists, the liberals. These are perceived to have joined forces to ruin Hungarian culture and identity, to exploit Hungarians, and, as Csurka phrased it in a metaphor, to “Palestinize” Hungary. According to Csurka, the exploitation of Hungarians may only be prevented if public life is cleansed of liberals, i.e., the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), and (ex-)communists, i.e., the Hungar-

ian Socialist Party (MSZP), who together are viewed as having prevented the real regime change while serving as the Hungarian outpost of international financial circles. The MIÉP would create an ethnocentric, closely controlled market economy and would give priority to Hungarians and domestic enterprises.

Csurka's talent for supporting his arguments with spectacular metaphors made his writing especially effective, allowing him to reach an audience much wider than the MIÉP's electoral base.

But it was only in the 1998 elections that the MIÉP managed to secure enough votes to get into parliament, only to drop out in the next elections in 2002. Probably the most important objective cause of the MIÉP's relative lack of success was that postsocialist Hungary had gotten over the crisis following the collapse of the socialist economy in 1997, and a fast recovery had made EU accession possible. Public spirit was permeated by hopes of unclouded prosperity and fast entry into the EU. That was the period when the large moderate parties of the left and the right, the MSZP and Fidesz, were trying to expand their electoral base through populist economic promises, leaving no room for the gloomy and pessimistic radical right.

After the turn of the millennium, Jobbik took up the baton of national radicalism from the MIÉP, which saw its fortunes decline rapidly following its defeat in the 2002 elections.

The Birth and Rise of Jobbik

In 1999, the Right-Wing Youth Community (later Jobbik) was established by a cohort of university students, including a number of former MIÉP activists. This civil society organization, which quickly took on political aims as well, threw itself into the 2002 election campaign in an attempt to promote the victory of the right and to facilitate a joint Fidesz-MIÉP coalition government. The elections were won by MSZP-SZDSZ, which came as a blow to the right. When the announcement of the results sparked protests, several Jobbik activists were observed participating.

Jobbik members active in the MIÉP expected the renewal of the MIÉP to bring about the renaissance of right-wing radicalism. Some—such as Gábor Vona, the future leader of Jobbik—joined in the new movement of civic circles initiated by Viktor Orbán after Fidesz lost the elections, in order to reinforce the movement of the right. Activists hoping for the renewal of the right-wing national movements soon became disillusioned

with both the MIÉP and civic circles. Reforming efforts within the MIÉP were blocked by the elderly Csurka. The cohort of younger activists who wanted to see change sensed that the MIÉP, with its stale style and Jewish conspiracy theories, was no longer able to attract new supporters from outside its circle of regular voters.² The other group also realized that the civic-circle movement was not meant to facilitate radical renewal, but rather to serve the Fidesz vision of a neoliberal middle-class Hungary disguised in conservative dress.³ By autumn 2003, Jobbik activists disappointed in the existing parties were ready to launch their own party as the genuine representative of the radical right.

Thus in autumn 2003, the new party was founded with 1,200 members. It carried the name Jobbik as the abbreviation for Movement for a Better Hungary. For the 2006 elections, Jobbik and the MIÉP formed a party alliance under the name of Third Way, but its joint list of candidates drew a mere 2 percent of the vote, and the alliance of the two parties soon dissolved.



Photo 8.1. Hungarian Guard recruits, March 17, 2012. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

After the election loss of 2006, Gábor Vona became the head of Jobbik, opting for an independent path. He turned out to be a talented, dynamic, and charismatic leader,⁴ who set a new direction for the party. Under the leadership of Vona, a new party platform (the Bethlen Gábor Pro-

gram) was developed, while the establishment of the Hungarian Guard is also linked to his name. Vona tried to reduce the conflicts between Jobbik and Fidesz and make Jobbik more acceptable to “more moderate circles.”⁵ In addition, he made efforts to tie more extreme movements to Jobbik as well. The choice of the red-and-white striped Árpád flag—which calls to mind the independent kingdom of Hungary while at the same time resembling the symbol used by the Nazi Arrow Cross Party in Hungary between the two world wars—as the symbol of Jobbik in December 2006, was designed to win the sympathy of traditional far-right voters.

The rapid emergence of Jobbik was triggered by three unforeseen events: (1) the political turn made by the coalition of the MSZP and the SZDSZ and its crisis after the 2006 elections, (2) the evolving crisis of the Hungarian economy, and (3) the reappearance of the “Gypsy issue” on the agenda following the tragic murder in Olaszliszka (see below).

The MSZP won the 2002 elections by promising a welfare regime change, but its coalition government with the liberal SZDSZ actually adopted an expansionary policy based on indebtedness and deficit funding. In 2006, the left-liberal coalition won the elections with promises to pursue economic growth through budgetary expansion. After the elections, however, the government made a 180-degree turn in its economic policy and started to introduce state budget restrictions. Then, in September 2006, the loss of trust and the feeling of betrayal resulting from such government measures escalated in rage and uproar when the secret speech given by the prime minister in Balatonőszöd was disclosed.⁶ In autumn 2006, a series of spontaneous rallies began on Kossuth Lajos Square in front of the parliament building, and on October 23, the anniversary of the 1956 revolution, rioters took to the streets of Budapest. Fidesz talked of election swindles, called the ruling coalition illegitimate, and demanded repeat elections. The government, however, stayed in power and tried to continue with its austerity program.

The moral crisis caused by the Balatonőszöd speech, the austerity policy, and the relentless opposition by Fidesz undermined the support for the governing parties. Between 2006 and 2010, the left-liberal electoral base evaporated. Support for the MSZP decreased to 20 percent. The public tacked sharply to the right, a favorable outcome for Jobbik, which was the most radical in demanding changes to the establishment. From a small and marginal extremist party, Jobbik had successfully transformed itself into a freedom-fighting force against its morally broken left-liberal opponent. The increasingly radical tone of Fidesz also contributed to the acceptance of Jobbik.

The political turn of 2006 brought about the beginning of economic recession, accelerated by the credit crises in August 2008. The global crisis called into question not only the credit-based economic policy of the “welfare regime change” as propagated by the MSZP, but also the liberal market economy model based on free trade, open economy, participation in the globalized world market, and European integration. The increasingly hopeless economic situation led to a rise in the number of protest voters who, as an expression of their anger and discontent, typically give their votes to radical and antiestablishment parties. The prolonged crisis gave a new meaning to Jobbik’s the third-way-type economic policy, which demanded a turn away from the free market, refusal to pay the debt, the national protection of Hungarian businesses, and increased taxation and eventual squeezing out of multinational companies.

Just as the political and economic crisis emerged, a tragic crime sparked long-latent anti-Gypsy sentiments. In Olaszliszka on October 15, 2006, Gypsies lynched the driver of a car that brushed against a little Gypsy girl who was not seriously injured. Jobbik used this tragic event to join in the political discourse through the theme of “Gypsy crime.” The Gypsy crime narrative allowed Jobbik to pose as the protector of “the honest, hardworking common people” against Gypsy criminals and “Gypsy terror.” As Jobbik started propagating the theme of Gypsy crime, many felt themselves being finally liberated from the left-liberal stranglehold of political correctness and allowed themselves to give vent to long-suppressed resentment, naming the causes of their real or imagined grievances. Cracking down on Gypsy crime enabled Jobbik not only to address its traditional radical right-wing voters but also to win new supporters, particularly in the eastern part of the country and among those who felt helpless and unprotected.

In the spring of 2007, the Hungarian Guard was organized with the assistance of Jobbik under the pretext of providing protection against Gypsy crime. Its paramilitary movement character proved both an important community- and organization-building force and a powerful tool to ensure media coverage. Analyses of Jobbik have found that the party gained national awareness by raising the issue of Gypsy crime and by setting up the Hungarian Guard as a national force of self-defense.⁷

Jobbik grew quickly in the altered political environment. It had a breakthrough in 2008: the number of local Jobbik organizations rose from 80 to 249, then to 387 in 2009, when the party membership reached 5,000. In the by-elections held early in 2009, Jobbik’s results were on the order of 7 percent. With its 14.77 percent result achieved in the 2009 European

Parliament elections, Jobbik became the third strongest party, finishing behind the MSZP by a mere 2.6 percent. After the European Parliament elections, Jobbik's membership doubled to 10,000, and the number of its member organizations reached 750. With the European Parliament election results, voters could consider Jobbik a legitimate major party. With Jobbik making headway, a real semantic revolution was also taking place in Hungary: topics such as Gypsy crime, blaming the Jews and the injustice of the Treaty of Trianon had become part of the public discourse.

In the summer of 2009, Jobbik's leadership became enthusiastically involved in developing the organization into the second-largest party in the country. Party leaders toured the nation visiting five to six communities a day, canvassing at local forums and organizing the party. Jobbik's platform, entitled "Radical Change," paid special attention to the importance of fighting "politician crime." The tactic of trying to alarm voters about the threat of the extreme right and Jobbik, used by the MSZP and the SZDSZ in the campaign, also contributed to Jobbik's increased visibility, especially as Fidesz began to turn against Jobbik for fear of its winning Fidesz's electoral base over to its side with its radical slogans.⁸ Paradoxically, it is possible that those delegitimization efforts actually reinforced Jobbik's legitimacy, as such concentrated attacks increased the chances of the party becoming a major force in parliament, and thus voting for Jobbik seemed worthwhile.⁹ In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Jobbik obtained 16.67 percent of the vote and finished third, only 3 percent short of the MSZP. Thus Jobbik became the third major force in the country and a medium-sized party not to be ignored.

National Radicalism: The Ideology of the Radical Right

National radicalism is a fairly coherent ideology. In this chapter, we dissect the ideology into key building blocks to show how it provided a guideline for the party and why voting for Jobbik seemed a realistic prospect for so many Hungarians.

1. The national character

The national character is the key feature determining the framework of the Jobbik party, both conceptually and in terms of action. The essence of the national thought is, as one pro-Jobbik blogger phrased it, advocating and resolving national issues, well-being, elevating the nation (even by the

most radical means and methods), and standing up for all Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin or across the ocean.¹⁰



Photo 8.2. Jobbik counterdemonstrators on their way to the One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) rally, March 15, 2012. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

It is difficult to understand the notion of national character without appreciating the intellectual influence of István Csurka. Even Jobbik did not deny being his intellectual heir.¹¹ *Unacceptable Reality* was the title of Csurka's collection of political writings published in 1986. To national radicals, "unacceptable reality" meant the revolt against the World War II order based on democratic principles and the free market, in the name of the dream of reuniting the nation across the Trianon borders. For Csurka and his followers, "national thought" equaled the unconditional protection and representation of the national interest against geopolitical realities and against EU integration, which was unacceptable to them.¹² It was not by chance that the public break between József Antall and István Csurka as well as the organization of national radicalism as an independent political direction took place after parliament passed the Hungarian-Ukrainian basic treaty, thus recognizing the Trianon borders, which Csurka and his

followers interpreted as a betrayal. In this case, the use of the adjective “national” can be interpreted as ultranationalistic.

Accepting the reality, an impossible compromise for Csurka, led Jobbik to openly oppose Hungary’s entry into the EU. This served as the basis for the party’s anti-EU standpoint and its actions against globalization and foreign capital.

2. Against globalization and foreign capital

The national character of Jobbik caused the party to oppose the intrusion of foreign capital. According to Jobbik, privileges in Hungary are not enjoyed by Hungarians but rather by multinational billionaires who colonize and exploit the country and to whom “our motherland” means hardly more than “a war map for a pilot.” Reversing the process of neocolonization and the exclusion of foreign investors are key elements of the party’s economic platform. Important objectives of the Jobbik platform include barring multinational supermarket chains from the retail market and promoting stores owned by Hungarians, transferring the ownership of the now mostly foreign-owned bank system to Hungarians and revoking the concession of large, foreign-owned commercial television channels.

In its criticism against globalization, Jobbik goes beyond condemning privatization, advocating against multinational companies that play a key role in the domestic economy, and protecting Hungarian businesses and soil: its ideology goes against globalization as such. According to the party’s arguments, the benefits of the massive global economic boost are enjoyed almost exclusively by the international financial sector, which exploits people. And here the distinction—one that became infamous earlier in a different context—comes into the picture: that between “our kind” and “their kind.” When the party talks about globalization, *our kind* refers to the exploited: small producers, retailers, family businesses, public employees, nurses, and teachers. Jobbik’s rebellious revolutionary character can be derived from this distinction. It calls for standing up against the globalized world order to protect common people: “It is time to raise our heads and stop the governors of the invisible Empire from depriving us of freedom, dignity, and a decent life through their banks that rob hardworking people, through their hypermarket chains that ruin Hungarian farmers, through their multinational corporations, and with their rubber bullets and police batons.”¹³

3. *Anti-Semitic rhetoric*

Although Jobbik denies being anti-Semitic, many references appear in its speeches and symbols, suggesting that party activists find the economic and political influence of Jewish people problematic. In one of his speeches, Balázs Lenhardt gave the following arguments in connection with Israeli citizens buying land in Hungary: “Maybe Fidesz is now driven by different objectives. Perhaps they have received different guidance from somewhere. The only question is whether the command was sent from Brussels, Washington, or Tel-Aviv.”¹⁴ The claim “Hungary for the Hungarians” and the metaphor of “the danger of Palestinization,” used by Csurka as well, are frequently recurring themes in the party’s speeches: “We have a dream: that Hungary is for the Hungarians, that our homeland will not be a second Palestine, and that we will not be an impoverished and irreversibly broken colony.”¹⁵

The Economics of the Third Way: The Eco-social Market Economy Platform

Jobbik’s third-way-type economic policy is built on the party’s antiglobalism: it rejects free-competition capitalism and envisions a closed national market economy restricted to small producers within a national framework.

Strong state participation implies not only the termination of the privatization process but reprivatization and a renationalization program. For the party, it means taking strategic industries into public ownership and canceling the liberalization of the energy sector while eliminating private pension funds. Establishing a Hungarian-owned banking system is a key element of Jobbik’s economic concept. The essence of the party’s farming policy is to regain the domestic markets of Hungarian agriculture, which is seen as equaling the protection of the national market, though without stating it explicitly.

The platform of the antiglobalist third way—as written in Jobbik’s Short Catechism—includes environmental protection, preservation of land for future generations, domestic ownership of the processing industry, and an economic system consisting of highly independent and self-sufficient micro-regions.¹⁶ In this view, an eco-social market economy would transcend the forces of globalization. The essence of this vision is localism—local self-sustaining economies and societies—instead of globalism:

We are going to put an end to looting the economy and return from the principle of “the people for the economy” to the principle of “the economy for the people.” The economy must be restricted in order to ensure a decent [eco] environment, a decent [social] life, and the interest of the Hungarians [the nation]. . . . Eco—because the greed of the economy has ruined the environment. And here I am referring not only to the political and social aspects of the traditional green such as environment conscious life style, energy savings, or renewing energy resources, but also to preserving the landscape, saving the countryside, and reviving the smaller, livable communities of people, i.e., the villages. Social—because the purpose of the economy is not economy itself but people. It is not simply about fair wages but about ensuring a livable life. Global capitalism has consumed its human resource, the people, at a rate which did not allow for its mental, spiritual, or physical regeneration; assembly lines have ripped families and bigger and smaller communities apart. Basic universal human values and a quality approach must be reinstated. . . . In an eco-social national economy the state will finally be able to fulfill its duties: to protect our natural treasures, to restore our national identity, to provide for the needy, and to create an independent, livable, and proud Hungary.¹⁷

A Strong Nation-building State

The objective of a nation-building state appears in the writings of István Csurka. The MIÉP’s program for a nation-building state is focused on building a strong middle class at the core of society.¹⁸ Jobbik also promotes a state-centered, antiliberal, right-wing ideology, but it puts emphasis on protecting citizens from foreign exploitation as well. In its universe, the strong state is responsible for defending society against the detrimental effects of globalization and for “restoring order.” A strong state stands on the side of law and order and eliminates the three types of crime menacing the country: economic crime, politician crime (meaning the corruption of socialist oligarchy), and Gypsy crime. The proposals advocating law and order include restoring the death penalty, introducing community service in correctional facilities, removing the homeless from public areas, setting up a special Gypsy crime unit within the police force, making the Criminal Code more stringent, reinforcing the army and the police, establishing a gendarmerie to eliminate Gypsy crime and legalizing the operation of the Hungarian Guard.

The Politics of the Third Way: The Third Way of the Right

The third way-type politics of national radicalism means a right-wing third way. A right-wing third way in the Hungarian party system means that Jobbik has a twofold message: (1) it sees itself as part of the right, and (2), at

the same time, as the representative of a third force offering a third way, a national alternative to the left bloc as well as to the Fidesz-led right bloc.

This idea also has its roots in Csurka's concepts. The MIÉP considered itself part of the right and the third way simultaneously, as reflected in the slogan that the MIÉP is Christian and Hungarian but neither right- nor left-wing. However, Csurka's way of thinking was determined by his view that the left and its coalition partner liberals were the local allies of global capitalism, while global capitalism itself equaled the order created by Jewish world power. Consequently, the MIÉP's chief enemies included the left (with its communist past, the MSZP and its allies) and the SZDSZ as the representative of globalization. Thus the MIÉP supported Fidesz and the right against the left-liberals. It was the "opposition of the opposition" in the 1998–2002 period, when Fidesz governed the country.

The right-wing character of Jobbik's third-way politics means that Jobbik is also anticommunist and strongly antileft and antiliberal. This is reflected by the fact that in the biography of many leading Jobbik politicians, there are references to the fact that some senior family members suffered atrocities or injustices during the communist dictatorship and that the resulting cross-generational resentments still determine the political choices of Jobbik supporters.¹⁹

The above cross-generational historical consciousness is one of the causes of the rage that is so typical of Jobbik. Linking past and present resentments, tracing past and present suffering back to a common stem—these are the historical memories from which the politics of the radical right springs. This resentment-fueled radical right standpoint helps to explain why it is so important for Jobbik to demand a new regime change—the "real" regime change that would exclude former communist functionaries from public life by the force of law.

There is a marked shift of emphasis, however, in Jobbik's standpoint as compared to the MIÉP. While the MIÉP declared the MSZP and the SZDSZ allies of multinational forces and supported Fidesz against them, Jobbik sees Fidesz as a liberal right-wing party in conservative disguise. As opposed to the present governing party, Jobbik considers itself the sole right-wing representative of the national thought.²⁰

"Gypsy Crime"

Demanding law and order is closely related to the importance that fighting "Gypsy crime" and "Gypsy terror" plays in Jobbik's politics. For Jobbik, Gypsy crime means that the Gypsies terrorize the ethnic Hungarian popu-

lation, especially in the entire northeastern region of the country, and there are certain types of crimes that are typical of Gypsies—such as stabbing, usury, and stealing wood and scrap metal—that should be tackled in a special way by the police. The party sees its historic role in having broken the wall of silence on Gypsy crime.²¹ According to Jobbik, a situation has to be created that would make Gypsies return to the world of work, law, and education.²² Those Gypsies unwilling to accept this are presented with two options: either leave the country because their parasitic, criminal lifestyle will not be tolerated any longer—or go to prison.



Photo 8.3. Protest at the Hungarian Guard initiation ceremony, March 17, 2012.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

But the Gypsy issue also appeared in a different form in Jobbik's ideas. Plans for restructuring the system of state welfare provision are intended to eliminate easy eligibility for welfare subsidies. According to Jobbik, the unemployed must be forced to do paid community service, and food stamp debit cards should be issued instead of cash. The party proposed to introduce a family support model which would reward work and support child rearing by providing tax credits in order to eliminate "serial child production" for welfare services.

Radicalism as a Political Attitude

In Jobbik's interpretation, radicalism is not an ideology but an attitude. Its radicalism is a key element in a chain of attitudes that begins with pessimism and ends with a wish to radically change the world.

Statements by Jobbik leaders clearly indicate a general pessimism regarding the sustainability and progress of the present world order. According to Jobbik, global capitalism based on the free movement of—or, as Jobbik terms it, the free robbery and looting by—multinational capital is doomed, as neither the earth nor humanity are able to keep up with such accelerated economic progress. The death of global capitalism will bring about—in Jobbik's view—the end of the multinational capital that rules the world and of the affiliated (neo)liberal market economy, consumer society, and liberal democracy as well: "It is possible that the gigantic capital concentration that has pricked its own balloon with its greed will somehow maintain its power through some transformation magic or the regime will manage to adjust itself, but it is also a likely (and currently the most probable) scenario that humanity will keep running toward the abyss until falling into it forever."²³ Pessimism is the root of the deep dismay over the position of the Hungarian nation in the present world order: "The crisis of the economy; the disappearance of public security; the termination of agriculture; the agony of domestic businesses; the crippled conditions of employees; the defenselessness of land, water, and energy resources; the looting by multinational capital and banks; the disappearance of villages; the shrinking population; and all the rest of our problems are only effects. The cause—the real cause—is the destruction of national identity."²⁴

The above concerns of Jobbik members about the fate and defenselessness of the nation fuel their rage and accusatory zest:

For my rage is not the rage of Gábor Vona but the rage of our grandparents whose larders were emptied to the last drop, whose land was confiscated, and who were crippled physically and mentally first after the world war and then after the 1956 revolution. My rage is not the rage of Gábor Vona but the rage of our parents who were brought up in deception and terror and who were taken advantage of by the same people as our grandparents. My rage is not the rage of Gábor Vona but the rage of my generation who believed in being able to live their adult life in freedom but now see that those who did wrong to our parents and grandparents are still here. They are still here stealing, cheating, lying. They send us away from our homeland, they take a better future away from us, and they ruin and imprison those who resist them. And finally, my rage is not the rage of Gábor Vona but the rage of our children already born or to be born in the future who want to live an honest, hardworking, and peaceful life in this country as

Hungarians. That is my rage, and anyone who does not feel it does not feel anything at all. And those who do not share this rage today, whose blood is not heated by this sacred rage, have no blood, have no heart, and are not Hungarians.²⁵

The attitude of rage is related to the generational character of Jobbik, being made up predominantly of rebelling youth. The anger and the revolutionary desire for change that are so typical of young people give impetus to radical attitudes and to the desire for radical changes.

The above speech by Gábor Vona, however, also indicates that Jobbik's national thought is ultranationalistic and exclusionary,²⁶ as this emotional manifesto suggests that those who do not share in this indignation, this "sacred" rage, are not Hungarians. There is an obvious logical connection to the infamous terms "alien-hearted" and "our kind" vs. "their kind," as these are also metaphors indicating exclusion from the nation.

According to Jobbik, the situation is so bad and so aggravating that only radical methods can mend it. The rage so typical of Jobbik activists amalgamates the ill fate of the nation caused by the tragedy of Trianon, the forty years of suppression under the communist dictatorship, and the perception of the twenty years since the regime change as a failure. The anger aroused by those intertwining failures and the elementary revolt against those deemed responsible for them are characteristic of Jobbik, defining its rebellious, or even revolutionary, attitudes toward the present conditions:

"In the last decade, Hungary was run over not by a single car but by a dozen trains... Hungary was deliberately and totally smashed. Now, instead of taking further slaps and painkillers, it is time for a radical—surgical—intervention."²⁷ For Jobbik, the purpose of such radical surgery is the rebirth of the nation and the country, and the establishment of a new social order where national renewal is possible and where Hungarians as a people will once again take their rightful place as determined by their history.

Who Supports Jobbik?

We did our initial research on the political attitudes of Hungarian employed voters toward the extreme right in 2003. Our findings in 2003 showed that sentiments of injustice, defenselessness and loneliness as well as identity crisis and strong political disillusionment were rather widespread. In 2003, nearly one-third of the employed voters of both major

parties were disillusioned with politics. Almost one-fourth of those who voted for the two major parties and two-fifths of those who voted SZDSZ had autocratic attitudes, meaning that a significant group of Hungarian employees was potentially open to the messages of the radical right. Those research findings forecast the situation a potential economic turn and political crises might create. We found that even by a strict measure, at least 20 percent of Hungarian employees exhibited attitudes of superiority, 36 percent political disillusionment, 10 percent intense nationalism, 18 percent anti-immigration, and 28 percent authoritarianism in 2003. These are the people who had the potential to become Jobbik supporters as a consequence of the severe economic and political crises of the country. The four years of crisis and the novelty of the appearance of Jobbik turned the potential into reality and made Jobbik the third-largest party in Hungary.

For the purpose of analyzing Jobbik supporters for this chapter, we conducted a secondary analysis of election surveys taken before the elections in the spring of 2010. The surveys were based on a national sample of 1,500 voters representative of the voting age population as part of the Hungarian Election Research Program (MVP) of the Hungarian Center for Democracy Research Foundation (DKMKA). Survey field work was performed by Szonda Ipsos and Medián on 750–750 subsamples. In the course of the secondary analysis, we first examined who sympathized with Jobbik by declaring that they would vote for Jobbik if elections were to take place the following Sunday and why they would do so.

Jobbik Voters

Jobbik voters form a rather particular group within Hungarian society. One of their key characteristics is that they are the most pessimistic of all voter groups when their own or the country's present situation or future prospects are considered. Among the voters of all parties, Jobbik supporters are the most convinced that both their own and the country's economic situation have markedly worsened. They hold the most pessimistic views on the economic prospect of the country and of their own chances.

Jobbik voters are typically dissatisfied with the political order of the country and with democracy as well; they agree the least with the statement that "citizens have numerous opportunities to participate in political decision making" as they maintain that "legislation is overly dependent on a few interest groups." Their responses indicate that Jobbik voters thought

at the time of the survey that the country was governed by an oligarchic pseudodemocratic system, where a few strong lobbies were in control and citizens had no influence on political decision making.



Photo 8.4. A veteran greeting the Hungarian Guard recruits, March 17, 2012.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

Jobbik voters are also characterized by a very strong lack of trust: they have the least confidence in people, and they agree the most—at the same level as Fidesz voters—with the statement that one cannot be too careful in our world. Their strict traditional conservatism is also reflected by their being the least supportive of equal opportunity for women, the most supportive of restoring the death penalty, and the most supportive of introducing restrictions to protect Hungarian culture from the harm caused by foreign movies and pop music. Jobbik voters are the most xenophobic, the most suspicious of foreigners, and the most disapproving of Gypsies, Jews, Romanians, and immigrants. They also tend toward authoritarian attitudes supporting strict law and order. They agree the most with the statement that the country needs some brave, tireless, and committed leaders trusted by the people, rather than laws and political programs. The supporters of the radicals agree the most with using stringent measures to force Romani to adopt a mainstream Hungarian lifestyle.

Jobbik voters are characterized the most by the need for a “Hungarian way” accompanied by pessimism toward the West and the EU—they believe that the country should not care about the expectations of the West but rather follow its own path, and they support further integration into the EU the least. Romantic notions of historical nationalism are the strongest among Jobbik voters, a sign of this being that they agree the most with the statement that Hungary should make efforts to alter the Trianon borders.

Jobbik voters position themselves as being most radical on the scale of modest to radical. It is worth noting that Jobbik voters characterized themselves as being the most interested in politics in spite of their deep disillusionment with the present political system. Hence, the discontent of Jobbik voters with the economic and political order is coupled with a need to change the present situation radically.

In all, 51 percent of Jobbik voters were recruited from the 2006 Fidesz-KDNP electoral base, 19 percent from the MIÉP-Jobbik base, and one-third from the MSZP base. Of Jobbik voters, 63 percent are men and 37 percent are women. With an average age of 29, Jobbik has the youngest voter base. A total of 38 percent of them have never worked, which is related to the average age of its supporters. A total of 63 percent are employed by some private business. Within this sample, Jobbik supporters are divided between skilled work (45 percent); unskilled work (38 percent); and white collar subordinate, junior, or middle manager (8 percent). In summary, they are predominantly students, young unemployed, and workers. Still, Jobbik voters tend to identify as middle class. There is an obvious contradiction between self-classification and the actual social status (as indicated by employment position). Thus, it appears that a strong frustration and a need to improve social status arise from the difference between the desired and actual social position that is typical of Jobbik voters. Such a difference indicates that Jobbik voters are typically those who feel that society treats them unfairly and does not give them the recognition they deserve. They might be the members of the group considering itself the hardworking and law-abiding majority being forced to live as a minority in their own country. This frustration may account for the strong antipathy toward the Roma people on the one hand, and toward the Jews and the West as metaphorical symbols of the colonizers and exploiters of the country on the other.

Paths to Jobbik

Here we develop a path model to describe the causal linkages from perception of crisis through political attitudes toward sympathy to the Jobbik cause.²⁸

In developing the path model, we attempted to find out how citizens perceive the effects of the economic crises and, on the basis of such individual perceptions, through what political attitudes they start to feel attracted to right-wing radicalism.

The path model being a linear regression chain, we have constructed several models explaining the regression. The stepwise method applied to expand the models was useful in the interference analyses and in excluding multicollinearity with the help of the tolerance test as well as in testing homoscedasticity (linearity analysis). Furthermore, each variant included in the analysis was standardized (the principal components entered the model already in a standardized form as zero-mean variants with unit deviance), ensuring that in the models the 95 percent confidence interval calculated around the nonstandardized regression coefficients (B) were equal to the 95 percent confidence interval calculated around the standardized regression coefficient (β), thus enabling us to test the reliability of the models. The numbers linked to the arrows of the path model indicate the intensity and direction of standardized regression coefficients (β).

We were able to identify nine different paths leading to sympathy with a radical right-wing political party. As our path model demonstrates, the negative perception of the economic changes and the pessimistic view of the future intensify the authoritarian attitude of favoring strict law and order and the belief in a strong-handed leader. Such a strong-handed leader with a platform of strict law and order is able to create a situation where Hungary can ignore the requirements of the West and follow its own path or even change the Trianon borders. In turn, this markedly nationalistic attitude leads—partly through xenophobia and the rejection of Gypsies, Romanians, and Jews—toward right-wing radical sympathies. Nationalism coupled with xenophobia becomes chauvinism, and this chauvinism is differentiated from nationalism by feelings that combine rejection, superiority, and hatred. The path branching from favoring strict law and order also has a direct impact on sympathy with right-wing radicalism through rejecting “undeserving groups” (xenophobia). Another path starting from the negative perception of the present situation and a pessimistic vision of the future leads through extreme social distrust linked to authoritarianism and favoring strict law and order (“It’s high

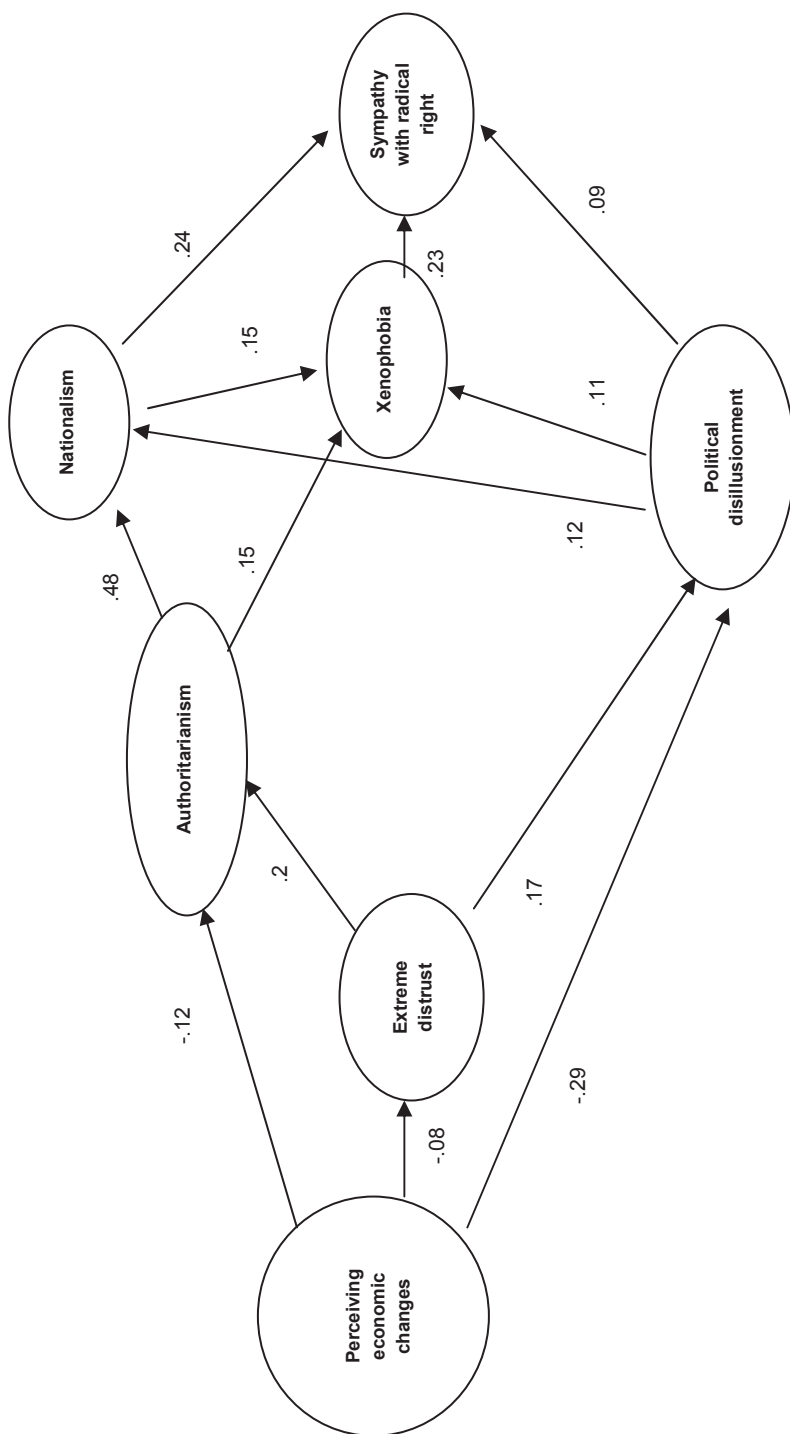


Figure 8.1. Path model of how national radicalist ideas are reached.

time that someone put the country in order and stop this uncertainty”) via the above-mentioned nationalism and xenophobia to right-wing radical sympathies. Further paths lead from a negative interpretation of the economic changes through extreme distrust to disillusionment from politics (protest voting), an attitude linked to sympathizing with right-wing radicalism—both indirectly via the xenophobic attitude of scapegoating (liberal-Bolshevik conspiracy, Jewish capital, exploitation by the West, or assistance of “undeserving groups” and Gypsies) and directly as well. There is also a ninth path directly leading from the negative perception of the economic changes to political disillusionment and protest voting directly related to sympathizing with right-wing radicalism.

The path model demonstrates that there are several paths leading to sympathy with right-wing radicalism and, through this, to potentially supporting Jobbik. The success of Jobbik is not a one-factor phenomenon and thus cannot be simply derived from antipathy toward the EU, Gypsies, Jews, or any other single social grouping. The partly interrelated political attitudes of nationalism, anti-Western sentiments, xenophobia, and political disillusionment have the strongest impact on sympathizing with right-wing radicalism. In the background, however, there is an attitude built on extreme distrust, the favoring of strict law and order, and pessimism concerning the economic situation and the future of individuals and the country. Uncertainty, loss of ground, and fear of the future engender both political disillusionment and a hope for a strong-handed and charismatic leader who will be capable of putting the country in order and achieving justice for the “honest, hardworking, law-abiding common people who are suppressed in their own country” and who are not recognized and rewarded by the present society and political system.

The path analysis performed using 2010 data generated new results as compared with our earlier analysis in 2003. Analyzing the data of the survey conducted in 2003, when the economy was on the upswing, suggests that a significant portion of the employed had political attitudes that can make citizens open to voting for xenophobic, radical national parties. But at that time there were only a few who voted for the MIÉP, the most significant radical right-wing party. Among MIÉP voters, however, there were both winners and losers of the social and economic changes.²⁹

By 2010, the intervening years of crisis and dashed hopes drastically transformed the composition of the group oriented toward the radical right. It was not only the losers who found the radical right appealing; they were also joined by many former winners who had lost ground during the prolonged crisis. At the time the survey was taken, approximately two-thirds of

the population saw their financial situation and that of the country as bad, and the same proportion was distrustful of people and disillusioned with politics and democracy. Moreover, half of the respondents exhibited authoritarian attitudes advocating strict law and order. Impoverishment, uncertainty, and fear of the future radicalized and pushed toward the radical right a number of those who, due to their view of the world, were already open to hearing the voice of such political siren songs.

The Characterization of Jobbik and the Classification of National Radicalism on the European Political Map

The almost uninterrupted three decades of progress in the golden era following World War II in Europe led to the development of a middle-class society of welfare, equality, and wealth as never seen before. With the fast increase in the level of education and new channels opening up for social mobility, social differences and political conflicts diminished. The bitter experience of civil wars between the two world wars³⁰ also inclined the representatives of the moderate right and left to lay the foundation for new compromise.³¹

By the middle of the 1970s, however, cracks were beginning to appear in the social and political systems of the welfare states. The rise of globalization and the competition posed by Japan, by the Asian tigers and then by China challenged the mixed system of state-controlled market economy, the dream of limitless expansion of living standards and that of the welfare state. The new flexibility in working conditions and relocation of industrial production was particularly detrimental to traditional industrial workers who had previously formed the base of left-wing parties. The shift to the model of a service economy was beneficial for many, particularly those with higher education. As a more segmented economy and society emerged, losers began to appear along with neoliberalization, deindustrialization, and the transition to a service economy. Due to these transformations, new social tensions built up all over Europe. This burgeoning malaise³² demonstrated that consensual democracy has its drawbacks: the corruption of cartel democracy, the oligarchic and middle-class character of social democratic parties, the banality of changing the political elite, and the technocratic character of political leaders. In addition, the transformation of the Western economy coincided with the increase in the number of third-world immigrants; the different skin color, religion and everyday culture of the immigrants made this change even more striking.

These changes propelled the emergence of the so-called third wave of radical populist right-wing parties³³ across Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. The parties belonging to the third wave expressed the citizens' increasing discontent with the consensual democracy of corrupt cartel parties, which were seen to neglect the needs of common people. It also expressed the losers' growing fear of the changes in their lives brought about by immigrants who did not appear willing to adjust to the culture of the "natives,"³⁴ who were foreign in their appearance (wearing strange clothes, having dark skin) and often making a living (also) by committing small or large crimes. These newcomers were considered dangerous and competitive in wresting job opportunities from the locals and taking advantage of the generosity of the welfare state. The populist radical right-wing third-wave parties that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Austrian Freedom Party and the French National Front, represented the opposition against both immigrants and the elite seen as permissive toward them. The anti-immigration stance of these parties was in some cases colored by historical ethnocentric quarrels deriving from the history and culture of the given people. The parties of the third wave were populist and antielite as they opposed the cartel democracy of traditional parties. Although their ethnocentrism and antielite populism reminded a significant group of analysts of the far-right parties of the interwar period, some third-wave parties adopted neoliberal, anti-welfare-state, and pro-market-economy policies; others supported the welfare state model; but all accepted the market economy. Consequently, they did not challenge the basic institutions of the market economy, political democracy, or individual liberties and thus cannot be called "extreme."³⁵

Jobbik's political ideology is substantially different from the ideology of the third-wave radical populist right-wing parties of Western Europe. Jobbik's economic policy, advocating a third-way, closed eco-social market economy, stands in clear opposition to the market economy model of free competition, and to the open and globalized but still integrated European market.

The parties of the third wave and Jobbik are both products of crisis, but of different types of crisis. Third-wave parties sprung up in a controversial period in which coexisting segments of recessionary and growing economy created a more segmented society. Jobbik grew in the soil of the failure of the system change to ensure a quick catch-up with Europe, but became popular following a major existential crisis of globalized capitalism. National radicalism developed in Hungary—one of the relatively poor "illfare" societies of Central and Eastern Europe, where the sudden open-

ing up of the market after the regime change not only shattered security but also brutally divided the not yet middle-class society into winners and losers. The early version of national radicalism represented by the MIÉP was far less successful than that of Jobbik because crisis and growth were equally present in the ambiguous era of the 1990s, and Hungarians tended to believe that catching up with and joining Europe could be their road to success. Jobbik has risen to be a major party due to the outbreak of the credit crunch and the ensuing major political crisis. The Hungarian crisis coincided with the crisis of the entire European model, or even the globalized model, and thus challenged not only the sustainability of the model developed after the regime change in Hungary, but also questioned the trust placed in progress and the market economy. Such pessimism and the search for a way out, for a new rejuvenation, determined Jobbik's national radicalism.

Radicalism is typical both of the third-wave parties and of Jobbik. In the literature discussing the parties of Western Europe, radicalism primarily refers to the radicalism of xenophobic slogans, and to the emergence of the rhetoric, symbols, ethnocentric-nationalistic thoughts, slogans and emotions of the far right of the 1920s and 1930s, sometimes overtly and other times like underground creeks.³⁶ But the majority of the radical populist parties of the third wave are movements of politicians socialized in fifty years of peace and prosperity.³⁷ In the case of Jobbik, the intense hatred³⁸ is what distinguishes its radicalism from that of the third-wave parties. With Jobbik, there is such a radical attitude of hatred and rage against internal and external enemies behind the radicalism of words that more closely resembles those of the historical fascism between the two world wars. Rage and hatred provide the basis for the belief in international conspiracy theories and for revolting against those who betray the country by selling it out to international actors in order to bring about the rebirth of the nation. The promise of national rebirth, a harmonious local society, and an eco-social society is almost the same as that of palingenesis (cathartic national rebirth). Palingenesis, in turn, is the core feature of Griffin's definition of a "generic fascist" party by.³⁹ Jobbik's radicalism goes against globalization and the free market and is aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society and the building of a strong national state for national rejuvenation and redemption.

Jobbik is so different from the third-wave parties of the radical right that it seems appropriate to view it as the first—and so far the most successful—party of a new wave, a fourth wave.



Photo 8.5. Precision and professionalism: Jobbik legal support worker at the Hungarian Guard initiation ceremony, March 17, 2012. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

A new type of radical right party family emerges as a consequence of the 2008 debt crisis and the economic crisis that predominantly hit the European countries, with Jobbik as its first and leading representative. The parties of this new wave stand against the globalized market economy and liberal democracy and advocate the creation of a strong national state built on a closed and limited market economy under strong state control. For them, the economic and political crises provided an opportunity to step out of their marginal position and attract masses of people with their radical slogans. In the background of rejecting the open-market economy and liberal democracy, one observes a chain of interrelated and mutually enhancing attitudes of pessimism, anger, and hatred, as well as the belief in the possibility of renewal in this world, or in redemption, if you like.

Jobbik is one the early messengers of a new, fourth wave of extreme-right-wing parties emerging from the crisis in Europe. This new wave does not constitute a part of the third wave that was created on the grounds of transforming wealthy welfare societies producing both winners and losers almost in equal proportion. Jobbik represents a movement of young people who nurse an immense hatred and rage for the ruined past and present and for the hopelessness of the future against the forces they deem alien, especially globalized financial circles and international finan-

cial agencies. Such radical attitudes, immense hatred, and desire to subvert the world order for a new future that is believed to be better make Jobbik distinct from the third wave and similar to historical forms of fascism propagating revolutionary and state-centered renewal.

Conclusion: The Breakthrough of the Radical Right

Hungary had no luck. The time allowed for consolidating the new regime was too short. The first years following the Kádár era, which ensured a relatively high standard of living and security, brought immense suffering in the transformation crisis. The collapse of socialist industry resulted in the loss of over 1.5 million jobs and destroyed the trust of great masses of people living in security and relative well-being, while the living standard of the narrow elite skyrocketed. The decade between 1996 and 2006 brought significant progress but proved too short to ensure a real “middle-classization” of Hungarian society, the relatively even distribution of well-being and the desired Western living standard. Despite immense effort and investment, the recovery period was too short to solve the internal societal tensions, poverty and underemployment, to bridge the wide gap between the eastern and western parts of the country, and to stop the deterioration of public institutions. Moreover, the prosperity of the period between 2001 and 2006 was made possible by the dual indebtedness of the state and the population, which made both the Hungarian economy and its households particularly vulnerable and defenseless. The period of austerity measures, which started in 2006 and was intensified drastically by the crisis of the world economy in autumn 2008, has again brought to the surface internal controversies and unsolved problems and has undermined the consolidation of the previous decade. The failed promise of the welfare regime change made by the MSZP in 2002 and 2006, the four years of austerity without any way out of the crisis, the increasingly futureless situation of individuals, and the perceived impotence of the state resulted in immeasurable disillusionment and despair. The despair generated by the economic crisis was turned into rage by the election campaign strategies of left-wing parties offering rose-colored promises and remaining silent on the austerity measures planned for the government cycle starting in 2006, by the disclosed Balatonöszöd speech admitting to the campaign lies by the reelected prime minister, and by a series of corruption scandals made public. Furthermore, the global crisis that topped the domestic crisis caused many to question not only the grounds for the

Hungarian market economy experiment but also the appeal of the Western model we had been dreaming about ever since the regime change in 1989.⁴⁰

Such disappointment generated immense anger in Hungarian society, as demonstrated by intensified radicalism, scapegoating, and a wish for a “real” regime change. Jobbik made its breakthrough in that special apocalyptic atmosphere and became the third-largest party in the Hungarian National Assembly, enjoying the support of the rapidly increasing mass of desperate and disillusioned people for whom the more drastic and radical the promised change, the better.

The impact of the crisis also manifested in the transformation of the supporters of the radical right in Hungarian society as compared to 2003: at that time, radicals managed to snag voters from among both the winners and the losers who feared losing their status. The analysis of the composition of Jobbik supporters indicates that in 2010, as a consequence of the major crisis, Jobbik reached the camp of the losers who had been hit the hardest by the crisis.

Jobbik is a party that sprang from the soil of a society feeling unsuccessful, angry, and discontent. Thus Jobbik is a party of more than frightening symbols, statements, and uniforms. In the case of Jobbik, there is an attitude of hatred and a wish for radical revolutionary remaking of society behind the radicalism of words, which was perhaps typical of the activists of the historical fascism between the two world wars. They have the same rage at the derailed fate of the nation and at the related dramatic events in the lives of individuals and families. In addition to this rage, they have the same hatred against those whom they hold responsible for the failure of the nation and the resulting failure of individuals. As Jobbik leader Gábor Vona has stated, their radicalism is not an ideology but an attitude. With this radical approach, Jobbik aims to “solve problems at their root instead of treating the symptoms.”⁴¹ The objective of radical intervention is the rebirth of the nation and the creation of a new order to finally allow the nation to strengthen and grow and to take its well-deserved place in the world.⁴² The key momentum of the promise of a distant redemption paves the radical, or even revolutionary, road on which the flag is carried by this national radical party.

There are many paths leading to the radical right with anti-Gypsy, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic ideologies at their end points, but in the background there is the crisis of society at work, made almost insufferable by the political and moral crises. Radical parties bloom when the operation of the political mechanisms based on moderate parties is disrupted. And that

is what happened between 2006 and 2010 in Hungary. Uncertainty, disorder, a sense of crisis, and fear are the factors that radicalize voters and make the raging parties offering radical platforms and redemption appealing to them.

In conclusion, we note that our survey also finds in Hungarian society a substantial pro-European group and a moderate bloc, which may well provide the basis for a successful antiradical consolidation, even should a radical party obtain 20–30 percent of the votes.⁴³ Indeed, several Western European countries, including France, Italy, and Austria, have managed to establish a consolidated and moderate democratic order in the face of radical left (communist) or radical right (Le Pen or Haider) parties achieving the support of 20–30 percent of the voters. The future of Hungary depends on whether moderate right and left could make their own historical compromise and stabilize the democratic system and the market economy.

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Immune Reaction

Social Responses to the “Hybridization” of the Political System: The Case of Hungary in the Central and Eastern European Context

Péter Krasztev

Modern revolutions come in various colors—rose, jasmine, orange or tulip—but they can also hide beneath pseudonyms such as the Arab Spring, the Bulldozer Revolution or the Revolution of the Elections. But what *are* they: symptoms of decay or hellfire, the most recent stops on the universal merry-go-round or the light at the end of the tunnel? Creative ways great powers use to further their geopolitical interests, or the long-hoped-for awakening of rootless and deranged societies?

Revolutionary identifiers have become, if not religions, at least a sort of *weltanschauung* in our small corner of the world, complete with lifestyles, identities, language codes, leisure activities, literature, and political parties. Nowadays, when two strangers meet, they spend the first few minutes scanning each other: first the external identity markers (newspapers, tattoos, accessories, etc.), then the hidden meaning behind the usage of words and expressions (e.g., “ethnic minority,” which denotes “Gypsy” for certain people in Hungarian, “decent people,” “well, of course, *those* there...”). Then they will see whether the other one goes to government rallies or demonstrations of the opposition, whether they attract or repel each other, and whether they will continue talking or prefer to buzz off in opposite directions.

The latest wave of what have been called “color revolutions” has arrived splashing onto the “split reality” of present-day Hungary. (Or it is the split reality of present-day Hungary that caused the waves? As you

prefer.) Several authors argue that the word *revolution* does not apply, and they are probably right, because the romantic aura of this word renders its proponents rather helpless in the face of cynicism. But for the sake of clarity I opt for this expression to denote *metaphorically* those (postmodern, postindustrial, etc.) *new social movements* that have stepped up in the last 15 years against the deficits in democracy within semiauthoritarian regimes, especially in postsocialist countries (though some political analysts include the Arab Spring). Obviously, there are many things that require explanation and interpretation here: what exactly these movements are, why they emerged, how our Hungarian movements enter the picture (in other words, how our split reality has modified the ideas and modes of opposition that came from other parts of the world), who those engaged in this rebellion are, why they are engaged in this way, and what their aims are.

Forms of Movement

A relentless researcher of movements—there are hundreds of such people all over the world, who have authored miles of library shelves of books on this topic—would shamelessly declare that the history of the world, or at least the cultural history of the world, can be described as a history of movements. In ancient times, there was the Zoroastrian religious movement, then Manichaeism, and finally Christianity itself. In the Middle Ages, each social and political protest in religious disguise was a movement, from the Bogomils to the movements of Jan Hus, John of Leiden, and Thomas Müntzer down to the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. After the theocentric worldview was shaken by the Enlightenment, and “Man” could at last start to control his own fate in modern industrial society (our virtual historian of movements would continue), Providence was replaced by self-provision, transcendent grace by responsibility, salvation by the desire for an earthly paradise, or at least an optimally comfortable life. From this was born the “project-oriented thinking” of the modern industrial age; the new economic and political systems were created by movements organized around the “salvation strategies” of political, ideological, and ethnic communities, nation-states and totalitarian states—that is, practically the whole social, political, and economic environment we were born into. These modern or industrial movements are characterized by Habermas by their central problem: the distribution of wealth.¹ Claus Offe expands this idea further when he claims that these

movements belong to the "old paradigm," and defines them as movements functioning according to the principles of the free market, taking growth and efficiency for granted.² This was still the case later, in the 20th century, and it resulted in the compromise between the capitalists and the workers' movements, who were "loyal to the regime." Thus, a balance—representative democracy—was established, with the mediation of the political parties. In this struggle for general welfare, civil initiatives merged into the multitudinous professional policies whose aim was development: the power of the political and industrial system was based on productivity and development, and departmental politics (as well as civil society, entangled in departmental politics) was designed to serve the welfare side of this intensive activity.

Let us look out from our movement-historian perspective for a moment: this was the age when Leslie White's "general theory of evolution" was a dominant theory of culture (i.e., the more efficiently a society spends energy, the more developed it is).³ The Western world believed in John Maynard Keynes's economic ideas (i.e., if underdeveloped regions copy the model of developed ones, they will also develop), and modernization was imagined as a linear "civilizational" process going from the center toward the periphery, as Anthony Giddens described it.⁴ In this civil-political ideal of high capitalism, order and clarity reigned, since—as Offe says—no alternative could offer more than that.⁵

The new social movements, on the other hand, were brought to life by the revolutionary (there is no better word for it) atmosphere of the 1960s. With typical vagueness, Habermas attributes this phenomenon to the increased importance of the "grammar of lifestyles," meaning that the "new politics" does not focus on economic, social, personal, and national security issues, but rather on quality of life, human rights, individual self-realization, and direct participation in public life.⁶ Liberation movements and workers' movements lost their appeal—the new movements, mobilizing masses of people, are alternative ecological, antinuclear, feminist, regional-autonomist, peace, and human-rights movements (fighting for the emancipation of immigrants as well as sexual and other minorities). Offe calls this new situation the "new paradigm," but also approves of expressions like "new politics," "new populism," "neo-Romanticism," "antipolitics," "unorthodox political attitude," "unconventional politics," and "politics of upheaval" as explanations for this new paradigm.⁷ According to Offe, the new social movements are characterized by three common features. The first is that they are related to the (physical) existence of the individual—body, health, and sexual identity; neighborhood and city;

cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identity. The second is that they lay more emphasis on existing values such as autonomy, self-government, and self-provision as opposed to manipulation, control, dependence, bureaucratization, and overregulation. And the third is the way people participate in the movements: these movements are informal and egalitarian; they function intermittently; there are no static roles (hierarchies); each person represents only himself/herself; their mode of operation is the campaign; they are organized in networks, with volunteers helping them and supporting them financially; and their main means of expression are street actions and demonstrations. Since they are mostly single-issue movements, they are incapable of negotiating or compromising with the powers that be; they are engaged in a game of all or nothing.⁸

To sum up the aforesaid: in this period, the idea began to take root that there are a multitude of worlds living side by side, with various ideologies and identities, lifestyles, and subcultures, none of them superior or inferior, and none of them possessing the one and only political, economic, or cultural truth. It was also in these years that the livability and sustainability of our environment, rather than growth, became a central issue. Along with this comes the idea that our world is inhabited by trained and multifarious individuals who are capable of assimilating to changing conditions, and that good political power, one that guarantees and coordinates this polychromatic world, is theoretically possible. Let us look out from our movement-historian perspective again: following the rupture in 1968, the stability of center and periphery was upset, the value of subjectivity increased, and individual experience was subsumed into academic knowledge; as for the economy, the Keynesian conception of development was replaced by a decentralized regional politics relying on internal resources; Julian Steward's "specific evolution" replaced White's as the standard theory of culture (development is measured not by energy consumption, but by the livability of the environment);⁹ as for social theory, Giddens's linear model of civilization was replaced by Shmuel Eisenstadt's conception of "multiple modernities" at the turn of the millennium (our world is shaped by the aggregation of globalizing modernization processes starting from multiple centers).¹⁰ In this new state of affairs, no more is civil society a mere ornament on the hat of institutionalized politics—it claims direct control and influence over itself; it desires to mediate between society (dynamically changing in step with the development of technology) and representative democracy (sluggish and lethargic in the last few decades).

A Bad Series

Let us glance at the following series: Slovakia (1998), Serbia (2000), Belarus (2001), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Azerbaijan (2005), Arab countries (2011), Hungary (2011–). After the shock of ethnocentrism we may feel at this undignified company (“what the hell do *we* have to do with *these* guys?”), we may start trying to see whether we can come up with any indicators that make us better than them. Perhaps we should just accept that we belong to the “extreme” category. In the meantime, let us stick with similarities; I will come back to the few differences later on (though they will not make us any happier).

Historically, one of the similarities is obviously the enforced modernization of these societies (started in fits, then stalled) and the resulting mistrust that ensues within them; another is the rhetoric, and only the rhetoric, of free-market capitalism. The historian Stephen Kotkin has called state socialist societies “uncivic societies,” and the Hungarian example certainly proves this: the Kádár regime was efficient enough to make opposition seem futile and thus eliminate social solidarity and autonomy, and these attitudes live on today.¹¹ The consequences of this attitude are dealt with by almost all the authors in this book: in these countries, civil society was either out of function when the semiauthoritarian regimes came to power, or if it did function, it seemed just as foreign for these societies as the political power, since in our part of the world most organizations were established either to satisfy the big international sponsors or were financed by political parties for their own interests.



Photo 9.1. Kmara Movement: Peaceful protest in Georgia, 2003.
(Courtesy of Pavol Demeš)

In Hungary, for example, the hope for the creation of an independent civil society disappeared when the environmental opposition movements that started in the 1980s fell apart by the 1990s and the democratic opposition grew steadily into mainstream politics.¹² As Lucan Way writes, the Arab Spring did not (and will not) turn into something similar to what 1989 was in Central and Eastern Europe,¹³ but we can now also say in hindsight that our 1989 did not make up for 1968—it did not result in a change of attitude. What we got stuck with instead was a withered Western representative democracy, without the civil “antibody” that should go with it. (In the words of 19th-century Hungarian poet Gyula Reviczky, we planted a palm tree on the Great Hungarian Plain.)

Civil society, fawning over omnipotent, institutionalized politics, managed to reproduce the pre-1968 Western model—however, in our part of the world, the backdrop to all this was not the promise to maintain the consensus on welfare and growth, but rather paternalism (i.e., political power can never be good, but at least it can give you something). In fact, one can discover shocking parallels between the construction of the semiauthoritarian postsocialist regimes with their rhetoric, power games and corruption on the one hand, and the everyday reality of our present-day system in Hungary on the other. In 2011, Lucan Way coauthored a monograph with Steven Levitsky on the post-Cold War authoritarian “hybrid” regimes. They call hybrid those regimes which preserve democratic institutions (parliament, Constitutional Court, etc.) *pro forma* (e.g., for the sake of international legitimacy), but use them only to reproduce their power: first they turn off the tap of economic resources for their opponents, then they monopolize the press, squeeze out their opponents from every economic and administrative position, and finally reshape the election system to suit them.¹⁴ They do this with a loud nationalist-populist and anti-EU/anti-American rhetoric, making allusions to conspiracy theories, citing the historical wrongs committed against their nation and making use of the channels of centralized media, thereby making the populace believe that they are all participants in the fight for independence of a small nation that has suffered a lot.¹⁵ The case of Alexander Lukashenko and Belarus exemplifies how fierce criticism from abroad can make an even bigger star of a dictator if the domestic soil has been well prepared.¹⁶ And the bad news is that these stories keep repeating.



Photo 9.2. Orange Revolution in Ukraine, 2004. (Courtesy of Pavol Demeš)

Several authors mention that the leaders of hybrid regimes like to copy “best practices” (or, rather, worst practices) from each other: they are especially quick in reacting to the machinations of the opposition, sometimes even using preventive measures.¹⁷ The most sophisticated ones—Aliyev, Putin, Lukashenko—established their own quasi-civic organizations and institutes of public policy and political analysis well in advance; they enacted a law for the financing of these organizations and another law for paralyzing the independents, then organized mass sympathy demonstrations for the government and patriotic activities for the youth. These people are still in power, and offer tons of ideas to our flourishing hybrid regime in Hungary—though one could argue that in 2013, with the fourth amendment of the constitution (to mention one difference between our country and the rest), we have most probably earned our place in the flagship. And since the above-mentioned experiences indicate that the reactions of autocratic leaders of our age seem to follow a uniform logic, we have little reason to doubt that what Ivan Krastev outlines may become Hungary’s future as well: “These were regimes where the citizens had the right to vote, but the governments reserved for themselves the privilege of counting the votes and announcing the results.”¹⁸ The extension of the right to vote and the secret list of voters outside Hungary is merely the first, awkward attempt down this path.¹⁹

Our Own Palette

I now come back to the dilemmas listed at the outset: what, after all, *are* these movements, sprouting from muddy Eastern soil, assuming a political role but with a civil narrative (thus hybrid themselves), and coloring the era of the twilight of certain hybrid regimes? Ivan Krastev is definitely skeptical about the myth these citizens have created about themselves. He does not think it was their intervention that saved democracy: “The concept of civil society was fundamental for the color revolutions as the idea of the ‘third estate’ for the French Revolution. The role played by the NGOs was deemed as important for the success of the color revolutions as that played by the Bolshevik Party in the success in the 1917 revolution in Russia.”²⁰ So the solution, according to Krastev, is as follows: “If one wants to be written about in history books, it is necessary to ensure that one has something to do with writing them. This is what the NGO leaders did. They were not only among the leaders of the color revolutions, but, more importantly, they have been the most active interpreters of the events. They were the ones fluent in English and in democracy-speech.”²¹ This is especially true of Pavol Demeš, who was the director for Central and Eastern Europe director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, as well as the coeditor of the book in which his paper, along with Ivan Krastev’s, was published.²²

Ivan Krastev was undoubtedly right that the West adopted and supported the civil narrative of the color revolutions in order to satisfy its own narcissism. However, a paper by a no less excellent analyst, Martin Bútora, makes the important statement that external intervention can only be successful if there is a genuine social consensus about the necessity of overthrowing autocracy.²³ The counterexamples of Belarus and Azerbaijan have proved this: where the political and civil opposition is divided and uncertain, all attempts seem to backfire.

But even if a society is apolitical, if there is a consensus between trade unions, churches, local governments, and other democratic forces that democratic institutions must be restored—as was the case in Slovakia—then the days of the autocratic regime are numbered. Whether it is toppled by citizens acting as the hinterland of the unified political opposition, or by politicians inspired by citizens, it does not quite matter—it is the outcome that matters.

If we take Offe’s “new paradigm” of the new social movements as our starting point, we can safely say that the West did not do more than hastily transplant the post-1968 conception of politicized civil society into the

soil of the new autocracies. This is what they wanted to see, and—again, using Offe’s concepts—this is what they in fact created: between the “institutionalized political factors” and the private sphere, they wedged in the new movement so that it would take political action within civil society, and thus question both private and political practice, as well as the system of institutions of both. These simulations of new Western social movements soon took over the tasks they usually assume in these regimes, i.e., they acted as an “immune system,” like in representative democracies—with more (Serbia, Slovakia) or less (Ukraine, Georgia) success. And where the “revolutionary situation” was not ripe yet, to use a nostalgic expression (Belarus, Azerbaijan), the investment of Westerners in transplanting best practices was in vain; they only wasted time and money.²⁴



Photo 9.3. Peaceful protest and “street puppet theatre” demonstrating how Russia moves corrupt politicians in Bulgaria, July 2013. (Courtesy of Péter Krasztev)

To return to the difference between the color antecedents and the situation facing Hungarians, it is not only in comparison with the respective power mechanisms that we are worse off—we are at quite a disadvantage in the civil sphere as well when compared to our revolutionary antecedents. Perhaps it is because Hungary is an EU member and the international community trusts internal, institutional solutions, or perhaps it is because the outer world has ceased to be interested in us—in any case, our civil opposition receives practically no external support, except for (mostly counterproductive) admonishments addressed to those in power. If we observe the activities of the Hungarian opposition from the inside, it is notable that nowhere (probably with the exception of Azerbaijan and Belarus again) did opposition activism entail such an existential disaster as it did in Hungary. Those in power are aware of everyone's political affiliations (e.g., which events they attend), especially on the local level, so those who work in the public sphere avoid any kind of activism. Those opponents of the regime who work in the private sphere can say goodbye to state commissions and tenders. Performers, with a few exceptions, are scared that they will find their name on the blacklist—as opposed to performers in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine—since cultural venues (theatres, halls, etc.) are mostly state-financed. Independent media have been relegated to the Internet. Of all the autocracies described here, only the most totalitarian one has been capable of preventing masses of quality professionals to participate in the opposition.

This is the human side of the situation in Hungary. A decisive difference between the Hungarian regime and other hybrid regimes may be found in ideological background. The government's System of National Cooperation is part of a well-elaborated, consistent strategy for the destruction of society, a strategy that started in 2002, when members of the now-ruling Fidesz party appropriated the use of the red, white, and green cockade, worn by people on the national holiday of March 15 to commemorate the 1848 revolution. This was the moment when private political preferences became individual identities, represented by external symbols—a self-definition against those with different political views. Families, friendly circles, and communities at work and other places were split because of this sophisticated power trick. Total cooperation, which has proved to be the necessary minimum in the case of all the color revolutions so far, and which the more sober Hungarian politicians preach about to no end, can be found only in half of our split society: the half that does not dote upon the new political identity with a quasi-religious belief that obliterates all rational thinking. Starting from 2011, a number of small

groups have been organized spontaneously around a single issue, ignoring the problems of others, so there is no unified civil narrative that could articulate the aim of the opposition, i.e., the elimination of autocracy. This was not the case where external help was available and where there was central support (though of course with democratic supervision).



Photo 9.4. Secondary School Student Network (KiHa) protest against the fourth amendment of the Fundamental Law in front of the parliament building, March 11, 2013. (Courtesy of Péter Krasztev)

We can clearly see this in the case of the One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) Facebook movement. Its dilemmas involve finding answers to the following question: how can we get involved in politics while remaining citizens?²⁵ The way in which Milla joined the Together 2014 (E2014) party was typical: the association, mostly with figures who had not been active in Milla before, joined the party, but Milla itself (whatever it is) did not. Milla celebrated the national holiday of March 15, 2013, in a peculiar way: even though it is part of the unified opposition, the speeches by its leaders—in which they gave voice to ideas diametrically opposed to that of the opposition—were held by separate figures and on separate stages.

The case of the Politics Can Be Different (LMP) party is similar: for years, there was a rupture within the party. Finally, its members split the party in two, effectively sacrificing themselves for their dream of “political citizenship” and their demand for a complete change of elite and of rhetoric. Thus LMP represents the concept of *new social movement* known from textbooks, as well as its inverse, which is not civil *and* political, but *neither* political *nor* civil. So, in addition to the main rupture in society, smaller cracks have appeared. Unfortunately, this does not indicate multifariousness and heterogeneity but rather a complete lack of understanding of aims and priorities.

Revolutions and Resistance

Try as I might, I can only find very complex answers to the dilemmas outlined in the very beginning of this study. Color revolutions are symptoms of decay, since in many cases all they achieved was the coming to power of a new but not necessarily better elite; they are also hellfire, because in some cases they resulted in the birth of a civil society that can mediate between the new elite and the lay public; they mark a recent stop on the universal merry-go-round, because the representative democracy they devoutly wish for has not yet started on the path toward democracy (the regime has stayed in place); yet the light is already visible at the end of the tunnel because once authoritarian regimes are toppled, the powers that be are at least forced to exhibit some self-restraint. And they are partly a creative way great powers use to further their geopolitical interests, since without external intervention, the new social movements could not have been successful. Finally, they also awaken rootless and disintegrated societies because these movements can take root only where there is a genuine need for them.

What we are experiencing in Hungary now is less than a revolution but much more than spontaneous resistance. Our multiply split reality determines the actions of antiauthoritarian political movements, but it does not channel the single-issue demonstrations of romantic citizens and students into a struggle for any political goal. Civil movements may be able to grow in the future, co-opting unsatisfied and organized masses—associations of employees or self-organized Roma groups, for instance—whereas students may be able to find an ideal goal that does not tie them to any of the political parties, e.g., mobilizing people to participate in elections (even if this is not a very original idea), thereby maintaining the momentum that seems to have been lost lately.

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CHAPTER 10

The Road of the Hungarian Solidarity Movement

János Boris and György Vári

Fledgling dictatorships and authoritarian regimes typically pamper their armed forces and law enforcement agencies, showering money and privileges on their members in order to win their loyalty and have them safely on their side in case of possible confrontations with the masses. If that were a measuring stick showing whether a system of government is dictatorial or not, then the Orbán regime in Hungary would certainly not qualify. There was, in fact, a piece of new legislation running against the interests of soldiers, policemen, and firefighters in 2010, retroactively canceling their traditional early retirement benefits, which provided the original “single issue” to spark off a labor-union–type protest movement by 2011. That, however, was only the beginning. The movement of the angry, disillusioned policemen, firefighters, and military officers, organized by their respective trade unions, was met by a group of intellectuals and middle-class men and women who had split off from another loose organization, One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla), because of its “apolitical” and “antiparty” attitudes, favoring direct political action instead. The Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity), much like Milla itself later on, was to travel a long and tortuous road rather swiftly to turn itself into a full-fledged political prodemocracy opposition movement. Taking on a well-organized and legally stabilized form, it finally emerged as one of the major constituents of the Together 2014 (E2014) party, which appeared on the scene on October 23, 2012, with the aim of removing the Orbán government in the upcoming 2014 elections.

The “Solidarity Story” in Brief

The unusually vigorous protest movement of the “uniformed men” that swept Budapest in the spring and early summer of 2011 brought with it large-scale rallies that drew urban middle- and working-class types into the streets. This movement brought two men into the focus of media attention, one a soldier and the other a fireman—both in their early 40s, both ruggedly handsome—and this pair, Péter Kónya and Kornél Árok, became emblematic figures of the new opposition. Both were union leaders of their respective professions. They were soon joined by a third man, Tamás Székely, the president of the Chemical Workers’ Union who had already made his name known when the government simply confiscated the savings collected in the private pension funds and forced their owners back into the state-run system. The Law Enforcement Workers’ Union, to which both Kónya’s and Árok’s organizations belonged, and the Chemical Workers’ Union, were by then seeking new ways to protect their members’ interests: ways out of the passivity, lack of credibility, and shopworn rhetoric of most of the other organizations.



Photo 10.1. The founding fathers of the movement: Péter Kónya, Kornél Árok, Sándor Székely, and Tamás Székely, October 11, 2011.
(Courtesy of Márton Tordai, Orpheush's Photography)

The fourth of the quartet who would become the founders of Solidarity, Sándor Székely (no relation to Tamás), came from a different background. He was president of One Million for Democracy – Civic Control Association (EMD), a group of disenchanted former Milla organizers already establishing itself legally as an association ready to enter into contact with the opposition parties. As a group that supported democracy and human rights, EMD wanted to topple the Orbán regime from the start, and thought that this might be achieved if the opposition could be backed by a considerably large antigovernment mass movement. Its members also thought that a movement of that kind must be based on trade unions, since outside the major political parties only the unions had the organization, infrastructure, and army of activists that would be needed for that daunting task.

Seeing their chance to join up with a genuine, and also tough, trade union group, EMD began to work together with the law enforcement unions in the spring of 2011, lending a hand in the organization of the one of the most remarkable rallies of the 2010–2014 period, which came to be known as the Clown Revolution. The foundation of Solidarity was announced by Kónya and his associates a couple of months later, as the crowning act of a three-day-long series of demonstrations called D-Day (Democracy Day). From the very start, Solidarity's efforts were two-pronged: actively seeking contact with the various democratic opposition parties (excluding any cooperation with Jobbik and the extreme right), it also kept deep roots in what may be regarded the "classic" type of civil society, however weak in general in Hungary, whose various apolitical organizations and groups united some of the most underprivileged minorities and classes of society. Several of these groups became the target of concentrated attacks by government austerity policies. Solidarity promised these groups increased political representation, while the injustices their members felt were happening to them also contributed to politicizing the groups themselves. Most of Solidarity's early actions were mounted in defense of these victimized groups. It took part in a demonstration staged by the movement against the criminalization of homelessness, and lent a hand to the teachers' organization Network for the Freedom of Education in collecting signatures for its petition protesting the government's centralizing measures in the school system. Solidarity activists handed out free meals along with the Children's Nutrition Fund in a special operation in some of the country's most poverty-stricken regions, and actively supported the hunger strike staged in front of Hungarian Television (MTV) headquarters by leaders of the Independent Trade Union of Television Workers and Filmmakers.

Besides promoting social emancipation in general, Solidarity, like the rest of the opposition movements outside parliament (and for that matter, like LMP as well), also laid considerable emphasis on the restoration of the rule of law and democratic government. Most of these organizations shared the conviction that the most unacceptable of the Fidesz government's attacks on basic democratic rights was its consistent policy to do away with social welfare rights. Solidarity demanded progressive taxation, strongly protective employee rights, and higher wages. Despite this, especially early on, its members neither saw nor described themselves as leftist. They thought they might be able to overstep the political front lines dividing the nation, ending the constant ideological warfare. This would prove to be an illusion—an illusion, however, then shared by all the new social movements (with the exception of Jobbik, of course). Another major objective was the raising of civic awareness, the level of active participation in political life by the population at large, complementing the parliamentary system with elements of grassroots democracy. Solidarity supported and provided active help to LMP's "social referendum" effort, ultimately a failure, because not even the joint efforts of the two organizations proved enough to gather the number of signatures necessary for appealing to parliament for a referendum.

The leaders of Solidarity and its activists blamed the inadequacy, irresponsibility, and corruption of the political elite for the passivity of ordinary citizens. "We regard it as our primary task to rally the disillusioned voters, to help them to awaken their political consciousness by providing intelligent and genuine ideas and solutions," they wrote in their first appeal.

There was quite a bit of road for Solidarity to cover before it would become one of the founder organizations of the election alliance between E2014 and Dialogue for Hungary (PM) in October of 2012.

From the Beginning to the Clown Revolution: Changing Wheels Mid-race

Before cofounding Solidarity, Péter Kónya, an army major, had been president of the Union of Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Workers for 13 years, itself a kind of mini-confederation consisting of seven separate member unions: policemen, firefighters, prison wardens, soldiers, national security employees, customs officers and civil defense personnel. Kornél Árok was already a member of the board of directors before becoming president of the Independent Trade Union of Professional Fire-

fighters. The two had known each other for seven or eight years and were in daily contact for the last two. When it became clear that the Fidesz government was intent on taking away the retirement benefits of law enforcement workers, and that the measure would apply not only to future recruits but retroactively also to personnel already serving, Kónya and his union decided to take radical action. "Kornél was the only one who stuck by me," Kónya said in a later interview, "while the other member unions began wavering, then backed out of the biggest protest rally, the Clown Revolution. That was how we became comrades-in-arms."

Thus the emblematic figures, the "faces" of Solidarity were law enforcement union leaders who had earned nationwide recognition and credibility by refusing to abandon their colleagues when their superiors (the national police chief, county chiefs, police generals) as well as the "official" union leaders simply acquiesced in canceling their entitlement to early retirement based on the number of years spent in service. The Clown Revolution, a rally held on July 16, 2011, which got its name from a snide remark made by the prime minister who, when the law enforcement union leaders asked for a meeting with him on the issue, said he would "send his secretary of state for clown affairs." The uniformed men responded by donning clown costumes, many even putting on makeup and red noses for the rally. By taking their job seriously and continuing to work for the interests of the people they represented, Kónya and Árok chose to leave the corrupt institutional union movement. They were forced to resign from the army and the fire department, respectively, and to give up their formal positions as government-recognized union leaders.

Logically enough, the primary basis of Solidarity came from the disgruntled army and law enforcement employees represented by the Clown Revolutionaries, supported (and this would be the secondary basis) by the rank and file of other trade unions joining in Action Unity, serving to reach above and beyond the framework of the formal confederation system in protecting the interests of their colleagues. The birth of Action Unity was largely due to the efforts of Solidarity's third copresident, Tamás Székely, and was to fall apart immediately following the establishment of Solidarity. The reason for its collapse was, as Kónya and his friends are ready to admit, that the leading functionaries of these other unions had not been consulted beforehand about unfurling the flag of a new movement at their joint rally in early October 2011. Kónya says today that they had no other choice than to present the other union and civilian leaders with a *fait accompli* because the latter would not have supported the expansion of their activity toward direct participation in poli-

tics. He was probably right, given the fact that he was removed from the military union on the grounds that “he had political ambitions.” Disciplinary action was also taken against him, since in an interview with the daily *Magyar Nemzet* he spoke about entering the political arena sooner or later, which was regarded as a violation of the armed services law.



Photo 10.2. Creating the atmosphere for protesting. (Courtesy of Solidarity Archives)

Their background in the institutional trade union infrastructure may have weakened, yet at the same time Árok and Kónya were joined by a group from a markedly different background. They were civilians in all senses (including that they were not uniformed), largely intellectual and middle class, and came from Milla, the Facebook group that, having already organized a number of highly successful street rallies, was developing into the main opposition force that emerged against the Orbán government. Yet Milla at that time still wanted desperately to keep away from the political parties and stay “civilian” at all costs. Milla thought it could

fight against the government's antiliberal, antidemocratic measures and its systematic moves against the freedom of the press, democratic rights, and the system of checks and balances without directly attacking it and demanding its removal. The members of the group that became EMD realized that direct political participation was inevitable. "Mass rallies with song and dance, a couple of strongly worded speeches, the mood of street parties where all your friends are there—those are okay," they said among themselves, "but what's the use when all you do is send your people home when it's over and tell them to wait for the next rally in three or four months' time? 'Good job, guys. We had a good time. Now go home and enjoy yourselves'?" Most of EMD's members had been Milla activists before founding their own legally registered association. At their meetings they came to the conclusion that perhaps the only way to defeat the Fidesz government in the next elections was to try to establish a genuine mass movement, and they contemplated how the infrastructure of the trade unions, such as it was, might be accessible.

Enter EMD

Sándor Székely, the president of EMD, later the fourth cofounder and copresident of Solidarity, was himself a former Milla activist. A small-time businessman with a background organizing pop concerts, he had been working to promote a 1980s-type "counterculture" during the "Orbán era" which, he thought, could easily last for decades. He met and stuck with Milla during a failed attempt to bring Ice-T to Budapest for a concert, and became stage manager of its demonstrations and rallies. After a while, however, he became disappointed with the endless debates at the Milla meetings about who should be allowed to speak at its rallies and who must be barred from them—especially when it came to the first genuinely large rally, which was to be held on March 15, Hungary's national holiday. The protest rally turned out to be hugely successful. Adam Michnik spoke to the crowd, and there was a general feeling that the emergence of a new, tolerant, liberal-minded center that would transcend the old left-right divide embodied by the current parliamentary parties could be the answer to a government that appeared to be harshly nationalistic and statist. On March 17, *The Economist* wrote, "From the conservative blogosphere to the salons of Budapest's chattering classes, there is increasing talk of the need for a new party, one that combines tolerance, diversity and, most of all, modernity. If and when such a grouping is born, March 15th 2011 will likely be seen as the date of its conception."¹

Maybe this was not exactly prophetic, but there was certainly some truth to it. In a sense, the rally of March 15, 2011, may be seen as the first gathering of the masses that would give birth to the E2014 election alliance in 2012.²

Indeed, the turnout was so impressive that Székely and a couple of like-minded friends thought that a mass of this size could really be the start of an opposition movement so that is what it ought to be. They first began organizing within Milla; in May the EMD was founded (already including a number of fairly prominent intellectuals such as sociologist János Dávid, soon to emerge as a highly influential figure in Solidarity, as well as Péter Krasztev, one of the editors of this book). The group, due especially to Dávid's well-established contacts within the labor union movement, got in touch with the law enforcement leaders, to whom they were especially attracted because of their imposing determination, strength and inherent discipline.

The very same characteristics, however, also caused a certain amount of distrust because the borders between strength and aggression appeared to be somewhat blurred. Some elements of the previous weeks' rallies, such as the firefighters' opening of hydrants along the route of their march, showed their ability to cause trouble, which the media hastened to play up far beyond its importance. Also, rumors (confirmed by surveys) kept circulating about the high popularity of the extreme right among military, police and other uniformed personnel and about possible contact between them. (These seemed to be corroborated by the fact that a leader of the official policemen's union was actually known to be a Jobbik member and European Parliament candidate who almost made it to Brussels.) This, for a time, made the liberal human-rights-minded crowd wary of the new movement, and they kept their distance from Solidarity for a while.

In his own telling, when he came on the scene, Sándor Székely did have some doubts as to whether it was right for him to speak to the large crowd gathered for the Clown Revolution at all, despite the fact that by that time it was already EMD that provided much of the "creative support." Later, however, the Clown Revolutionaries, now supported by the intellectuals and professionals in EMD, won the sympathies of several opinion leaders belonging to the left-liberal intelligentsia, which now saw them as the "popular" basis for its own endeavors. For a while, Kónya would be the darling of the left-leaning media, such as there still remained, as a fully intelligentsia-compatible military man, a lower-class leader of the masses in tune with their liberal ideals.

Transition Round Two: From D-Day to the “Árok Affair”

While the initial reaction to the movement of the “Clowns” and EMD in left and liberal circles was one of caution because of their assumed contact with Jobbik, the government made attempts from the other direction to isolate law enforcement staff and their problems, and to present Kónya and his friends in its own media as a bunch of selfish do-nothings whose only problem is that “they can no longer retire with a full pension at 40.” As Kónya was to say later, they were the guinea pigs on whom the government tested its policy of turning people against each other; the rights of various groups could be taken away to the applause of other groups who did not realize that they would be next.

The months between the Clown Revolution and D-Day were spent developing Action Unity with the unions (which would provide the basis for the next series of demonstrations), attempting to replace the “lost” trade union hinterland with a new one and seeking adequate responses to the government’s attempts at discrediting Solidarity. Also, considerable time was lost trying to work out an agreement on cooperation with Milla. The difference in approach of the two groups prevented a joint rally on the next national holiday, October 23, which remained an exclusively Milla event, while Solidarity held a rally of its own the preceding weekend.

The most important character of the new trade union hinterland of the future Solidarity was Tamás Székely, the president of the Chemical Workers’ Union. Székely had been pushing for a change of guard, a new generation in the leadership of the trade unions and a dismantling of the system of political tutelage that resulted in each union lobbying with the party whose client it became. Árok, Kónya, and Székely shared the view that the unions should not be tools of the parties. For three and a half years, Kónya had been cochairman of the Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions (LIGA), whose leader, István Gaskó, had been openly backing Viktor Orbán in his ambition to return to power. Their divorce turned ugly when the Law Enforcement Workers’ Union was expelled from LIGA because of its leaders’ increasingly critical attitude of Gaskó’s personality and methods. Later, when the member unions of the Law Enforcement Workers’ Union themselves backed out of the Clown Revolution, the new Hungarian Trade Union Forum established by Tamás Székely, the predecessor of Action Unity, assured it of its support. Székely’s own Chemical Workers’ Union had supported the actions of Kónya and Árok from the very start, ever since the “fire hydrant opening” rallies. Though now thoroughly political and a member of a party union,

Solidarity still retains its role in the protection of labor rights, although Tamás Székely withdrew from it in 2013 to become the new president of the Autonomous Confederation of Unions, which has some 20 member unions. He also retains his presidency of the Chemical Workers' Union.

The group also had close relations with several others of the "new generation" of union leaders, several of whom were speakers at its various events and whose members participated in the rallies. Still, the entire structure and development of the three-day event dubbed D-Day, including its theatrics (Árok descending on a rope from the top of the tunnel across Castle Hill to Clark Ádám Square, the starting scene, in a gesture symbolizing invasion by the forces of democracy) was aimed at widening the scope of the organization's activities from labor issues to opposition politics in a general sense to creating a broad-based political opposition movement nationwide.

The speakers at the closing rally (the biggest event of the three days), coming from different areas and walks of life—union leaders, a representative of an old-age pensioners' association, and, in the name of the "grandchildren," a young university student—all seemed to be making the same point. On the one hand, they called for unity. On the other, they emphasized the interrelationship between political democracy and the protection of genuine interests of all classes including the disenfranchised and most poverty-stricken minorities and classes of society (the disabled, the unemployed, the Romani, the homeless, etc.), criticizing the Fidesz government's utter indifference to the grave problems of these groups. The message of unity was also hammered home by the closing speech delivered by Péter Kónya, who announced the establishment of Solidarity. Árok, Kónya, Sándor Székely, and Tamás Székely became copresidents. The movement emphasized its openness to anyone regardless of creed or political affiliation. Its main principles, therefore, were formulated broadly enough to encompass the most general demands acceptable to anyone accepting the framework of a democratic society. That is how the leaders described the movement, a movement they would soon propose in an English-language introduction written for their invitation to the opposition table. Their basic approach was more centrist-liberal than leftist.

The Hungarian Solidarity Movement is committed to free-market economics, the rule of law, and to government based on a full system of checks and balances. It supports constitutional democracy; diversity of opinions, cultures, and beliefs; fair competition among parties; and respect of the rights of all minority groups. The movement is also strongly committed to an economy regulated fully in line with EU rules and regulations and to the respect of basic citizens' rights as laid down in the Charter of Funda-

mental Rights. It is equally devoted to civil and entrepreneurial rights while bearing in mind the common good as the guiding principle for social organization. It emphasizes the efficient and solidarity-based operation of communal facilities as well as the importance of taking correctional steps, long overdue, towards the proper functioning of these systems.

The Hungarian Solidarity Movement welcomes all persons who agree with the above described basic principles, regardless of their ideological or religious affiliations and emotional attitudes.³

Where the Roads Part



Photo 10.3. Péter Kónya. (Courtesy of Hajnal Fekete)

During the next two or three months, the expulsion of Kónya and Árok from the official world of the trade unions became final. They were, especially in the last few years, always “different” and “foreign” to those bodies. Kónya, as has been mentioned, came under disciplinary action by the Ministry of Defence because of an interview he gave to the progovernment daily *Magyar Nemzet* in October. The ministry deemed his taking a political role a violation of the law, which forbids soldiers to do so. Kónya fought back in the courts even though he had by then resigned from the

army. In any case, he found the legal framework provided for the protection of interests of military and law enforcement personnel far too limiting, even by traditional trade union standards. The new laws in the making were even worse. They would, he said, effectively prevent union leaders from doing their job, defending the interests of their people, while in the field of law enforcement there would be even tighter restrictions. "The changes to the law now under consideration would simply forbid members of the law enforcement services, naturally including their leaders, from so much as criticizing the government or any of its ministers. They could lose their jobs if they do so."⁴

Later on, Kónya went even further. "My oath as a military officer," he said in an interview given to one of the authors of this chapter, "made it my duty to protect the democratic rights and integrity of citizens. Had I stayed, as a soldier, within the confines of the new rules while the democratic government I swore to defend was being dismantled before my eyes, I would have violated that oath."

On January 2, one of the evenings when the government and its ruling elite were celebrating the enactment of its controversial new constitution at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest, there was a large demonstration happening outside the building in protest of the same constitution, and Solidarity played a key role in its organization. "As the governing party celebrated its achievements inside, tens of thousands of Hungarians rallied outside the nation's 19th-century opera house on Monday in a rare opposition protest of what critics see as a campaign by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to undermine democracy and consolidate his power," the *New York Times* read.⁵ Indeed, it was the first time that all the opposition parties took part in a common demonstration under their own flags and posters. A number of civilian groups and organizations also joined. The speakers remained strictly "civilian," and Solidarity provided the umbrella under which they were all able rally together without allowing their interests to conflict with one another. The turnout was great and the mood quite militant. The same *New York Times* article cites Kónya: "Petr Konya [*sic*] of the Hungarian Solidarity Movement, which helped organize the demonstrations, told the cheering crowd that 2012 would be a year of hope. 'We want the rule of law back and we want the republic back,' Mr. Konya said, to loud cheers. 'Viktor Orbán forgot that the power belongs to the people, it belongs to us, and we will get it back from them.'"

A little later, Kornél Árok was also forced to take the same step as Kónya: he left the service. (A fireman still on active duty, he had been transferred to a post far away from both his home town and Budapest, thus

making life impossible for him.) As would soon become clear, he had ulterior motives: his ambition was to become a party politician, which members of the law enforcement and emergency services are not permitted by law to do. The idea that Solidarity might in time turn into a party, or else develop its own party as its political wing, had been present in the thinking of the organization's leadership from the very start, especially in EMD. But they thought that this should be preceded by a massive buildup of support, the development of a well-organized nationwide infrastructure and a large membership ready to be mobilized. Árok, however, wanted to speed up the process and urged that the move to found a party be made right away. Moreover, he began organizing on his own. In doing so, he came into a head-on collision with the other three copresidents. The strongest opposition came from Tamás Székely, the union leader who had been a loud critic of the tradition of close contact between the unions and the political parties, which had also functioned as the unions' *modus operandi* ever since communist times. What the others disagreed with was mainly the timing, which, in their view, was premature. They felt Solidarity should first develop enough strength and have deep roots as a mass movement capable of exerting serious pressure on the political parties of the opposition to unite. Their most spectacular attempt at helping the opposition formulate its common goals and policies was the initiation of what they called the Democratic Roundtable (DEKA). DEKA would turn out to be unsuccessful: Solidarity failed to bring the opposition parties to the roundtable. Still, DEKA served as the most powerful argument against Árok's ambition to form a party. It would have been odd for the organization promising to provide the framework, and offering itself for the role of mediator, to host meetings between the main opposition parties while at the very time announcing the foundation of a rival party. In any case, Solidarity's character at that time (as described above) also prevented the formation of a party, so broad was the basis on which it defined itself. It also made consistent attempts to renew the system of representative government by complementing it with elements of grassroots democracy and direct representation while also pursuing traditional civilian social welfare goals as well.

The organizational structure of Solidarity, then busily being built, had been a mixture of horizontal and hierarchical features up to that point, at which it had an elected leadership and elected functionaries, complemented with grassroots elements. The country was divided up into three main areas plus the capital. There are local (village or city), county, and regional levels all below the national presidential body; all levels are

headed by coordinators. The rest is informal rather than highly disciplined: in the early days, Solidarity did not even have members. It had followers instead, leaving it open for them to decide the political direction in which they wanted to move.



Photo 10.4. Solidarity activists blocking the road near Kecskemét when Viktor Orbán was expected to visit the town, March 2012. (Courtesy of Solidarity Archives)

Founding a party was simply not even on the horizon for the majority in January 2012. At a coordinators' assembly on January 28, 2012, in the presence of 80 coordinators, an agreement was reached that the issue of party founding would be shelved until early September, by which time it was to be clear whether DEKA had been successful or not. In a couple of weeks, however, Árok again spoke in a radio interview about his ambitions with respect to a leading role in a party, after which he was removed from his position as copresident for violating the agreement. It turned out that he actually had had a "dormant party" for years—*Szövetségben, Együtt Magyarorszáért* (SZEM)—which he planned to reactivate and for which he was already recruiting from among the activists of Solidarity.

Árok's removal brought about a serious crisis in Solidarity. Part of the original grassroots support, including the coordinators in certain regions, especially Árok's home turf in Transdanubia, was on his side. These were

the retired policemen, firefighters, and soldiers, veterans of the Clown Revolution, for whom Árok was as much an embodiment of the original idea of Solidarity as Kónya. EMD members were harshly attacked as a bunch of outsiders with no organization and no support behind them, who had hijacked “their” movement and manipulated it to suit their own ends. The old problem of the regions versus the capital, present in every field in Hungary, seemed to emerge within Solidarity, too.

The movement’s leaders also came under heavy criticism for their “passivity,” for “doing nothing.” A connection was made between the charge of doing nothing and the establishment of a party. Civilian resistance was deemed useless by Árok’s followers. On the other side, Árok was still suspected of hidden extreme-right sympathies, which kept some influential Budapest intellectuals away from the movement. It turned out that Árok had an entry card to parliament that Jobbik had provided for him, so there had to be at least some kind of contact.

The departure of the “Árok wing” caused an organizational crisis within Solidarity, though according to those who remained the actual number of those who left was surprisingly low. Hardly more than 80 or 90 people left Solidarity, but most of these were mid-level leaders who were loyal to Árok, leaving a gap in certain counties and localities.

Even more dangerous was the possible damage done to Solidarity’s image when Árok left. Kónya and Árok had become an emblematic duo together. “The names of Kornél Árok and Péter Kónya have gained major political importance by now,” the influential and ever-so-cautious political analyst Gábor Török wrote, “since they are capable of something that none of the opposition leaders can achieve: in a world extremely wary of and disillusioned by suit-wearing politicians, they have credibility as the representatives of the masses of people disappointed in the current government.”⁶ The public could easily view the conflict as just another struggle for power and status, and think that Solidarity, rather than changing, had rapidly sunk to the level where, as was widely held, all established political parties and organizations were staying. The image of Solidarity as the integrator and unifier also suffered.

The loss of momentum could also be felt at Solidarity’s March 10 rally (March 15, the actual national holiday, had by now been firmly “occupied” by Milla). There were some notable speakers, some memorable speeches, and a great deal of enthusiasm, but the turnout was considerably lower than at the previous rallies.



Photo 10.5. Solidarity rally, March 10, 2012.
(Courtesy of Márton Tordai, Orpheush's Photography)

In the months that followed, Solidarity made headlines a great deal less frequently than in the preceding months. Organization building seemed more important, and leaders and activists began a serious tour of the country. The number of recorded supporters reached 8,000; Solidarity was present not only in all of Hungary's 21 counties but also in every community with more than 10,000 inhabitants. "Solidarity reaches people we cannot reach," political scientist and LMP MP Gergely Karácsony said in an interview, "It has a greater number of member organizations than membership in LMP, and its organizational power rivals that of the big parties."⁷ Solidarity at that time helped LMP in collecting signatures for a petition that LMP had initiated.

Solidarity activists participated in all major protests, whether they were about the criminalization of the homeless, religious freedom, or the repressive measures aimed against some smaller churches. They demonstrated against Jobbik's anti-Roma provocations and took part in antifascist demonstrations organized in response to the rising tide of anti-Semitism and the restoration of the cult of Admiral Horthy, Regent of Hungary between the two world wars and an ally of Hitler.

They also took part in local actions all over the country. It was characteristic of these events that they spontaneously established the much-

wanted cooperation and unity between the activists of various opposition parties on a local level, a unity which also included local civilian organizations, thus creating an opportunity for genuine self-government, for people to have their voices heard in local affairs.

Strategic Choices

Ever since its birth, Solidarity was trying to break out of the trap that held all new political movements captive, including LMP, which was also established on the basis of civilian networks. Their take on the situation was that the regime change had been derailed; that the political classes had become corrupt, selfish, and uncontrollable; that the media system was incapable of fulfilling its role as watchdog because it had slipped into an uncomfortably close relationship with the political parties; and that political campaign funding and political decision making were lacking transparency, with shady deals replacing genuine parliamentary work.



Photo 10.6. Solidarity march from the Chain Bridge to Elizabeth Square in Budapest, October 23, 2012. (Courtesy of Solidarity Archives)

With the economy in recession, the country was being torn apart. In the regions hardest hit by unemployment and poverty, the conflicts became

ethnicized by the extreme-right party Jobbik and its followers, since those were the very regions where the Roma population was greatest in number and most visible. Unemployment rates among Romani were the highest, and the ratio of Romani among the poverty-stricken lower class was and is far higher than in the general population.

In addition, “identity warfare” drawing on injuries suffered by various groups of society in the earlier, dictatorial periods of Hungarian history had become part and parcel of the parties’ strategy (especially after 2000). Rather than holding up valid practical political alternatives, they relied on the group ties and family traditions of their voters. Party affiliation among followers of the two major parties became an identity issue, effectively turning the political scene into an ideological theatre of war fueled by emotions. This was mainly a result of strategic decisions made by Fidesz; nevertheless, much of it was also taken over by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). Both had a vested interest in maintaining this state of affairs and the symbolic space they had furnished for as long as possible, suggesting that there was no “third choice”; it was “either them or us.” To paraphrase, anyone who was not with “us” was either “an enemy of the nation” (Fidesz) or an “enemy of democracy” (the MSZP).

This is what the new movements tried to deny. However, the new developments made it very difficult, if not downright impossible, for them to break out of the vicious circle. Fidesz had, in the meantime, systematically dismantled the whole structure of democratic government, doing away with checks and balances and getting hold of all major positions of power. The fact that it could do this without any hindrance, while the sovereignty of the people, the basic principle of representative democracy, had become drained (the people, since they felt the whole system was a mere formality, made no attempt to defend it) resulted in the new movements finding themselves on the same platform as the established opposition parties, as they also attacked the government for its antidemocratic practices and continued reduction of social and democratic rights and freedoms. This made it imperative for them to unite. Solidarity was the first to undergo this crisis, which, however, did not last long since the idea of unity had always been present in the organization. Solidarity had made it clear that it was ready to ally with anyone, whether the MSZP or the Democratic Coalition (DK), in order to remove the Orbán government. Péter Kónya, however, said in an interview in March of that year that unity might be more easily established if “those actors responsible for shaping the past 20 years who want to take part in the alliance would acknowledge their mistakes and perhaps even apologize for some of their actions.”⁸

At the same time, during the summer of 2012, the idea emerged that together with LMP, Milla, and a new party, Fourth Republic! (4K!), they should form a “New Pole,” showing the alliance of the new movements as an alternative to both Fidesz and the MSZP, and giving sufficient weight to their demands when the time came to sit down at the negotiating table with the MSZP, which was inevitable. However, this idea did not reach maturity and its future was rendered especially uncertain by the emergence of former prime minister Gordon Bajnai as a possible candidate for the leadership of a united opposition.

Bajnai had been prime minister for only a year but proved to be fairly successful in handling the crisis; he also took steps against the informal, corrupt decision-making processes in various areas, which made him acceptable for the new movements. His economic policies were basically liberal and far from the New Pole’s more leftist demands. On the other hand, he also urged that the left-right ideological warfare be closed once and for all with the same vigor as Solidarity itself. Bajnai and his Patriotism and Progress Public Policy Foundation had in the meantime worked out a number of concrete action plans regarding various areas of social and economic policy. He appeared more of a technocrat than a warrior like Orbán (or former prime minister and DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány) but his very character gave hope that the ideological war and constant turmoil might be over and that a period of social peace might ensue. He signaled that intention by calling both Viktor Orbán and Attila Mesterházy (the MSZP leader and candidate for leader of the opposition) patriots and genuine democrats. Thus as an establishment figure, Bajnai was atypical enough to also be acceptable for Solidarity. As usual, a great deal of bargaining and negotiation went on between the parties organizing the opposition rally on October 23, the next national holiday and the anniversary of the 1956 revolution. As a consequence, Solidarity was able to join the rally staged by Milla this time. (Its supporters, this time including some prominent intellectuals such as Ágnes Heller, met at a different location and marched across the Chain Bridge and along the banks of the Danube to show their strength, eventually joining the crowd gathering for the Milla rally at the site.) Moreover, Gordon Bajnai’s intention to return to the political arena and run in the upcoming elections was by then an open secret, and most of the participating organizations wanted him to announce his return at the October 23 rally.



Photo 10.7. Solidarity march on the Chain Bridge in Budapest, October 23, 2012.
(Courtesy of Solidarity Archives)

Through all kinds of contact and meetings, he was persuaded. By then, Bajnai was seen as some kind of savior by many in the opposition movements. Party banners and logos, however, were again barred, and only nonpartisan speakers were allowed on the stage; this included Bajnai himself, who promised to do his utmost to beat Orbán and his regime in the 2014 elections, to remove the flat tax that crippled those in the lower income brackets, and to restore the rule of law and democratic government in general. In line with his technocrat image, he promised, above all, good governance. The climax of the rally was that the three organizing groups (Solidarity, Milla, and Bajnai's Patriotism and Progress) announced the establishment of the E2014 election alliance. This made it clear that the New Pole idea had been disposed of, or had morphed into the new movement. The original scenario would have included also LMP in the alliance, but LMP decided to stay away. Not long after, the party split in two over the issue of participation in the common anti-Orbán alliance—which, in the end, would inevitably include the MSZP too. This was pure election mathematics. Fidesz had changed the election rules to suit its own taste, making it very hard if not downright impossible for its adversaries to win, as a result of which the opposition had no other choice but to unite forces and agree on a single opposition candidate in every constituency. The

MSZP (but also Bajnai himself) was unacceptable to some in LMP. The other part, which thought that getting rid of the Fidesz regime was more important than its reservations about forces and figures from the past, left the party, founded its own party, PM, and joined E2014.



Photo 10.8. Solidarity protest against the fourth amendment to the Fundamental Law, Budapest, March 11, 2013. (Courtesy of Solidarity Archives)

On the Slow Move toward the Election in 2014: A Brief Glance at Solidarity in Its Current Role

Early in March 2013, E2014 turned into a party. This, along with the signing of an agreement with PM, was announced on March 7. The 30 founding members included 10 from each of the participating organizations (Solidarity, Milla, and Patriotism and Progress), each contributing a co-chairman as well. Thus Péter Kónya became the cochairman representing Solidarity. The members of the PM leadership also became members of the presidency. Bajnai is recognized as the leader even though he yielded the formal position of chairman to his associate, campaign manager Viktor Szigetvári.⁹

Solidarity, now as a member of an election alliance, retained much of its earlier character, but its role within the alliance has been somewhat

problematic from the start. Outside the major parties, Solidarity is the only organization in Hungary today that has a nationwide infrastructure, with hundreds of activists ready to be mobilized all over the country and a large number of followers, estimated today in the neighborhood of 10,000. The number of its sympathizers is probably even larger. It now has its own circle of intellectuals and scholars who help formulate its platforms. In this sense, Solidarity has consolidated itself. Its economic policy proposals, however, remain center-left and fairly moderate, even though some of its advisors suggested that the leadership take more radically leftist positions within the alliance in order to raise its visibility.



Photo 10.9. An “increasingly radical intervention”: Preparations for the statue toppling performance, September 29, 2013. (Courtesy of Péter Krasztev)

Solidarity offered traditional trade-union-type support to employees fighting for higher wages and labor rights that were severely curtailed by the new laws. Fighting the new set of restrictive labor laws has been one of the prime targets of Solidarity ever since the laws were enacted in 2011, and it is one of its avowed goals to have them removed. The flat tax introduced by the Orbán regime, which according to the latest surveys has really been advantageous to only the upper 10 percent of income earners and neutral or disadvantageous to the rest, is another major target; Solidarity wants it replaced with a fair, progressive tax scale, which is now a common objective of the entire opposition.

In addition, Solidarity kept its strong commitment to the most underprivileged segments of Hungarian society, the lower class now finding itself the victim of systemic persecution: people on disability pensions, the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the (mostly Roma) inhabitants of the country's most impoverished regions. Solidarity also makes the most radical gestures within the opposition. At one of its rallies on September 29, 2013, its street performance symbolically toppled a foam statue of "the dictator" Viktor Orbán (made out to be similar to Stalin's statue brought down in 1956 in what was the opening act of the revolution). Reactions were mixed; some of the liberal Budapest intelligentsia found the performance crude, some even calling it "repulsive." Rumors, few of which were true, spread that the statue had been symbolically "killed," that the head, severed in the fall, was kicked around, etc.¹⁰ Bajnai himself, who spoke at the rally, felt obliged to distance himself from the performance. Others, however, felt that while Bajnai's party was colorless and boring, especially for an opposition party, Solidarity at least brought some life and humor into it. The government-owned media and Fidesz's spokespersons screamed bloody murder in unison. In her widely read blog, *Hungarian Spectrum*, Éva S. Balogh wrote: "Hungarians used to be known for their humor. They used to relish political symbolism. Now, it seems, some on the left are so concerned with appearing politically correct that they can't enjoy a piece of political theater (and, in the process, stand behind one of their own). They'd better learn, and learn quickly, that it's hard to tip-toe to victory."¹¹

Solidarity being the largest, most active and best-organized member within the E2014-PM election alliance, with activists in the forefront as the "foot soldiers" in all of its operations nationwide and many operations of its own, was disappointed by the attitude of Bajnai and of its potential ally, the MSZP, regarding its statue-toppling demonstration. Without the help of Solidarity, the visibility of E2014 would have been much lower,

they insisted. Solidarity activists, however, felt that they were barely making their voice heard within the alliance and were excluded from decision making within E2014, while both Bajnai's Patriotism and Progress and PM, each with no organization to speak of, were being listened to and had more respect than they. Solidarity's leaders demanded a greater role in the affairs of the alliance and a more visible presence.¹² The conflict, however, was—at least for the present—smoothed over.



Photo 10.10. The head after the political street art performance, September 29, 2013.
(Courtesy of Péter Krasztév)

This is where Solidarity stands at the time this chapter is being finished, as the 2014 elections inch closer day by day, with E2014 slogging through a long and tortuous bargaining process intended to achieve “unity” and the much-hoped-for common front of all opposition forces. Such a result has not materialized so far.

December 2013

Postscript

At the time this chapter is going to the press it is past the 2014 elections. At the last moment, the much-demanded unity of most democratic opposition forces did come about (with the exception of LMP, which refused to join) but ended in utter failure at the polls. Defeat had seemed a foregone conclusion even to leaders of the makeshift coalition headed by the president of the MSZP, which ran a halfhearted, dissolute, and ineffective campaign. What was not anticipated was the size of the defeat, which was nothing short of a disaster. Gordon Bajnai’s E2014-PM party won four seats in parliament altogether as part of the alliance. Of these four, however, two turned out to be Solidarity seats, with Kónya running on the party’s national list and one local seat having been won by a Solidarity man. As had been anticipated, Solidarity bore the brunt of the election campaign, such as it was, having been the only organization with grassroots support and a corps of activists ready to be mobilized. Thus, Solidarity’s position within a weak party has, or appears to have, grown stronger. At the organization’s last nationwide conference, held after the elections, the decision was reached that Solidarity would remain a member of E2014-PM for the time being, but the proposal that it ought to found a party of its own is still on the table, and Solidarity’s fundamental dilemma remains what it was.

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Milla: A Suspended Experiment

György Petőcz

The story of One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) is a short chapter in the 25-year Hungarian political transformation. It was an experiment that came to a quick halt, never quite expressing or even conceptualizing the question of whether or not the postcommunist period could be abridged. It proffered the illusion of replacing elitist politics by civil society but failed to provide a new model for that replacement. It may seem a failure as a movement, but perhaps a less pessimistic assessment would be that the vision offered by Milla has not *yet* found its time for success.

The Moment

In Hungary, late autumn and December of 2010 was a period of stress and distress. In April, Fidesz-KDNP, the center-right conservative coalition had won more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. This provided the winners full space for an unforeseen and unprecedented political take-over. In what seemed no time at all, the new powers saw to the complete removal of their political rivals. The so-called System of National Cooperation, as the government propaganda framed it, expanded to encompass the whole of the public sphere. The road from revolutionary rhetoric to the everyday firing of public servants was very short. The public media were “cleansed” and filled with politically reliable journalists and managers. Other powers, like those of the Constitutional Court and the president of the republic were curtailed. New tunes about a “Hungarian way” and the “decline of the West” were aired. A backward-looking, revisionist, and

self-centered discourse was given momentum. And on and on. All this was accompanied by an abrupt and profound change of elite.

On the other side, there slumped the defeated. The political “enemies,” and many others who never thought of themselves as political, were nonetheless compelled to give way to the newcomers. Many, after having experienced the nationally centered, power-oriented political discourse, found themselves in deep distress and deep despair. They were actively exposed to the expansion of the new elite and the removal of all checks and balances. Since the beginning of the democratic transition, the middle class and the political class had never been so deeply divided: those assigned roles in the new regime on top, with no room for the rest, whether because of their former position, political attitude, cultural image, age, or—in some cases—family roots. All this transpired in an atmosphere of surveillance, suspicion, and reborn self-censorship.

And there was the feeling of *absurdity*. In December 2010, Hungary was preparing to take over the EU presidency. Notwithstanding, there was no day without news from Budapest about new attacks on democratic norms and institutions, the embattled attitude toward the international financial organizations and the embarrassing details concerning the prospective new constitution. Finally, and on top of everything, came a new media law, with drastic restrictions on media freedom and the abrogation of basic democratic principles. The prospects were all the more gloomy, since by this time some sectors of the media were the last credible bastion from which to at least question the power of the parliamentary two-thirds.

The political opposition crumbled in disarray. The formerly ruling Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), after eight years of idle government, lost its appeal and authority. Politics Can Be Different (LMP),¹ the other non-right-wing oppositional party, could not get beyond a careful balance between the governing right and the postcommunist MSZP (and Gyurcsányists).² Ordinary citizens, whether disliking the political changes or bearing the burden of them, were left with no means of political expression. Their voices were not channeled nor were they heard. Hungarian society took its blows without resistance or strategy. The other side was disintegrated and atomized.

Such was the context when Milla first appeared on Facebook. “I stumbled upon it in its first two hours of life on the web, and there were already 200 people enrolled as friends. The media law made me realize my own personal responsibility. People always wait for someone else to solve their problems. But no one else will solve them. That is why I came to

Milla.” Thus recalled, in the summer of 2012, the cultural entrepreneur László Laki, who soon became one of Milla’s leading activists.³



Photo 11.1. Milla demonstration, October 23, 2012. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

From Demonstration to Demonstration (December 2010 to Mid-October 2012)

December 21, 2012, was the day the new Facebook page emerged. It was created by Péter Juhász, a communications expert and civil activist, just after the adoption of the new media law by parliament the night before. In the morning, broadcaster Attila Mong of Hungarian Public Radio kept a one-minute silence in protest against the law. That was one of the most dramatic days of the last 22 years. The first note on the new page ran as follows: “Naturally, we don’t accept the Media Council as the supervisory board for the press. The legally elected majority has declared war against those values [from private property to freedom of speech] that they swore to protect. We will not let them steal the last 20 years.”⁴

Péter Juhász recalls:

A friend of mine wrote me a letter at Tilos Rádió and TASZ [the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union] saying that there was going to be a demonstration on the day of the me-

dia law vote. I immediately answered OK, I would come. Five days before the date, the action became uncertain because they were completely unprepared. I met András Szeles, a 22-year-old guy who had launched the idea. They still had no program, no press release, and no registration with the police. "How many organizers are you?" "I am alone," was the answer. He had launched an idea on Facebook, and that was it. "Excellent," I replied. I fight for the honor of civil society, and there were already more than thousand people who had responded positively. It was impossible to draw back. I agreed to put together the demonstration. The technical part is no big deal: police, press, invitations, etc. I called the students I knew. The demonstration went well; there were about 1,500 people on the square. The next day, I launched the Facebook page. For me, the subject matter was of secondary importance. What I really wanted was a quick communication channel for democratically committed people. By the second day, we were 30,000.

Later, the number connected reached to 120,000.

The history of Milla was written mainly in street demonstrations and the speeches. The first one was called for January 14, 2011, in front of the parliament building. Its spontaneity and number of participants surprised everyone. This was the first demonstration in Hungarian history that was organized and advertised through the Internet. And this was the beginning of a long chain of demonstrations against the Orbán government. The issues were the media law and antidemocratic measures in general. Emotions were fresh and lively, and the demonstration was repeated in two weeks' time and with similar success. The speeches centered around slogans such as "We will not let them!" and "We have to take our future into our hands!"

Among the speakers, perhaps Balázs Bodó, a media expert and research fellow gave the fullest expression of the general mood:

To tell you the truth, I am glad about this media law. I am glad, because it has finally provoked some debate about the use of media in general and the era of the Internet in particular. We have started to raise questions about how the Hungarian media operate, and on how the fourth power should be improved... The other day I read that an unprecedented number of doctors want to leave the country to seek jobs elsewhere. Many of my fellow economics students left the country to work, to teach, to do research. Discussions among friends are focused on the urge to leave. They go because the Wall is down, and there is nothing to keep them back... There is no reason to stay here, cowardly and faithless. Frankly, I am thankful for what is happening with us now. Finally I feel some fighting spirit and citizen consciousness... To quote a statement by an outspoken and enthusiastic young man in the spring of 1989, from beside the coffin of Imre Nagy, "Nobody should believe that the official state party will reform itself on its own." I do not know whether what we see emerging today is a party state or not. But I am certainly aware that the future of the republic is up to us.

The breakthrough came on March 15, 2011. István Szalai-Szabó tells us:

The idea was circulating in Milla that we should work on a really big demonstration. Frankly, we did not even have that many ideas other than to continue with this demonstration game. It was basically three of us who did the bulk of the job—with the help of many others, of course. Many of the speakers and musicians we invited refused to participate. There was fear in the air. The translator for Michnik withdrew on the very eve of the event. We had one whole night to find a replacement. So, instead of doing what we would have wanted, we did what we were able to do. It was dramatic. On the day of the demonstration, we were there at the bridge, anxious. There had been quite a crowd for Orbán's speech that morning. Then came the moment when people started to arrive. The square filled up. We were crying. Perhaps we could not say huge things. But it was a real success that people dared to come.

The speeches were mostly about the feelings of disbelief and shock over the acts of those in power. "We want dialogue!" "We want discussion, not dictatorship!" "No step back from '89!" shouted the speakers. The size of the crowd proved that the arguments and hype used by the government were not all-convincing and that the total seizure of power did not lead to omnipotence. The hope emerged that total power would create its own opposition.



Photo 11.2. Actors Eszter Csákányi and János Kulka, regular presenters at Milla demonstrations. (Courtesy of Gabriella Csooszó)

The next demonstration on October 23, 2011, was as convincing as the previous one. The leading slogan came from a recent rap song, “I Don’t Like the System” (*Nem tetszik a rendszer*). The criticism of the system and style of government became more all-embracing and pungent than before. At the end Balázs Dénes, the head of TASZ, launched the message for the immediate future: “If we don’t like the system, then it is high time to talk about what we would like instead.”

On March 15, 2012, Milla’s was not the only demonstration by the growing opposition. The Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity) held its own event, with its call for a coalition of oppositional parties and forces. This strategic possibility created a challenge for Milla, which was at that time still opposed to any direct political activity or cooperation. But Milla’s demonstration was bigger than ever before. The speeches were in the same vein as before. With one important step ahead: the principle of remaining equidistant from Orbán’s center-right and the MSZP was added through an initiative known as the National Minimum. As a positive reaction to Dénes’s call half a year earlier, this called for freedom of the press, an election law that guaranteed fair representation, an independent judiciary, transparent and democratic legislation, transparent use of public money, and solidarity with the values of the EU. Such were the cornerstones set for political parties that wanted to gain the support of Milla.

The Conflict

Milla continued to hold its weekly meetings. The general mood was that the group should retain its civil character. Péter Juhász, the Facebook page admin, was a convinced defender of this position. The vast majority of participants—whoever chose to join had the right to speak up and vote—were strongly opposed to forming a political party or assuming a directly political role. This was in contrast to the success of the demonstrations. Expectations were rising, and external pressures caused the internal breaches to widen. The civil and the *de facto* political positions (Milla organized by far the largest antigovernment demonstrations) were obviously in conflict with each other. The next political elections, set for spring 2014, seemed dangerously close. In fact, for a group that was able to draw tens of thousands of people to the streets, “civil” and “apolitical” were far from obvious. Answering the question “What is Milla?” took on a new urgency.

On that question, most Milla civilians did not have a ready answer. They were thinking in terms of a model for democracy wherein the public

exerts strong control over decision makers and the different professions and local interests organize themselves and enter into a dialog of equals, both with each other and with the authorities. The civic ethics of participation was the main principle. Both the previous styles of governing, those of the MSZP and Fidesz, were unacceptable to them. They refused the excess of the political parties, the political corruption, and the ravaging party duality. Their orientation was emotional rather than anything else, far from ideology, theory, hardheaded tactics, or programs.

However, there were many who wanted more. They thought that the huge crowds at the demonstrations expected more and more political content. Already the first really large demonstration, the one in March 2011, felt like a watershed for them. "It was strong. March 15 established Milla's credibility. But the speeches were about the media and not civil society. Media *is* politics. This was the message that attracted people on the following October 23. 'I don't like the system' was a good slogan, but many expected more than that," observed sociologist János Dávid, who by the time of the second event had already left Milla. He belonged to those whose primary aim became to bring down the Orbán government. He thought that the first demonstration "amply showed the need and the revolutionary spirit, and that we should move!" In April 2011, around 30 Milla activists created an association, the One Million for Democracy – Civic Control Association (EMD),⁵ which later split from Milla to become an important precursor to Solidarity.

"Where to?" was an important question for everyone. Had they not reached the limits of how far one can go while still in the guise of civil protest? Is there not more than that when someone starts to formulate expectations from politics? "The formulation of concrete programs goes beyond the defense of the palm trees," says economist Bori Takács. As László Laki put it, "We are on a path, whether we like it or not. Soon we may reach the point where political participation becomes necessary, even if now we refuse the idea."

By the end of 2011, the question of a left-center alliance and Milla's relation to it became the all-embracing issue in the internal debates. The *I Don't Like the System* (*Nem tetszik a rendszer*) blog hosted a forum entitled "The Price for Our Support" (*A támogatás ára*). The first post was a strategic article by Péter Csígó.⁶

Csígó took a strong position against an *imminent* alliance among the MSZP, Gyurcsány's party, LMP, and Milla. He thought much of the population was so antagonistic toward the first two that allying with them would lead to a fall of popular support. All alliances should be preceded

by the strengthening of the new political participants and the framing of a civil program. "These times are for strategic thinking, not for coalitions. The false project of getting together would kill the first in its seed, for two reasons. First, it suggests, and falsely so, that the democratic opposition can win in 2014. However, the presence of the MSZP in this coalition would make the 'democratic' victory an illusion. Second, the alliance would thwart a basic distinction between an anti-Fidesz coalition and an antiestablishment democratic and civil movement. Today our democratic and civil movement has to devise not one but two programs." The first level of program making was technical in nature and was done in preparation for a government-changing coalition. The second level was different in nature "because it is those political parties that grew out of a civil movement. What should they do and how should they work in a free and democratic system (both of these are lacking now). . . . The global refusal of the Fidesz and MSZP establishments has no sense without a presentable civil alternative. . . . Such an alternative should speak about employee rights, the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises, poverty, the eradication of corruption and oligarchies, our competitiveness in the global market, and its preconditions in health care, education, and the appreciation of human capital, national sovereignty. That is, it should speak about the reconstruction of our political community in such a way that all its members feel esteemed as citizens."

Csigó initiated and organized, hand in hand with Protect the Future (Védegylet) and the Student Network (HaHa),⁷ a conference called "Dis-mantled Democracy, Ungovernable Country."⁸ "The hypothesis of the conference was that the Orbán government was not a turning point in the history of Hungarian democracy. It only led to an overstatement (due to the possibilities given by a two-thirds majority) of some underlying currents that have been with us ever since the first Orbán government, continued for eight years under the MSZP and finally culminated in these last two years."⁹ . . . The conference participants were of the opinion that in media and politics, in the economy, in the field of civil control, in the preparatory phases of legislation, and in public administration, the political elite behaved as a unified political class—so much so that the derailment of democracy is partly due to this fact," says Csigó.

In the meantime, new posts kept coming to *Minimum+*, a discussion forum about the preconditions of any support for political parties by Milla. In July 2012, Csigó presented a text in three parts.¹⁰ The thesis was simple, well argued, well documented, and very well timed. Among Internet users, it holds, "the political space was divided in three: a large mass of

voters appeared that was as averse to the ‘nationalist right,’ represented mainly by Fidesz (and Jobbik), as it was to the ‘socialist left,’ incarnated by the MSZP and Gyurcsány’s Democratic Coalition (DK). There appeared a third pole in between. The new pole identifies itself with green, European, civic and liberal values.”¹¹ With this article, the deeply rooted feelings against the former political elite, which had always been present in Milla, was given political understanding and perspective. The role of Milla would be to help create and lead the third pole and express its aims. These ideas inspired the theme for the final plenary session at the Green Summer Academy in August in Bodajk. Milla, Fourth Republic! (4K!), LMP, and Solidarity announced that they would be willing to form the conceptualized third pole. Through this, however, Milla set off on a route that led to its involvement in hard-core politics.

Organization

Some Milla leaders had in fact set off well before the organization of Milla, as Juhász states:

Three or four years ago, we started talking with Szalai-Szabó and others about how to get the civic organizations to join forces and cooperate. There was the idea of a house for civilians, shared by other organizations, that could foster informal contact and better knowledge of each other. The problem was the lack of shared issues and interests. I visited many organizations and realized that communication was the most important thing. Many do excellent work, but people don’t know about them, they don’t know each other, and they have too few activists. I started to act as a one-person civil house. I was mainly interested in activities that could serve for cooperations. For me, this Facebook page is not the first in that respect. I always tried to concentrate on specific issues and to build up single-issue communication channels.

Juhász was mainly interested the civil control of public authorities and actions: “This is sorely lacking in Hungarian democracy. There are too few watchdog organizations to signal when someone steps over the constitutional limits and safeguards.”

Many people shared such views. The enforcement of civil control and the representation of local or sectoral interests were in the foreground. There were those who wanted more solidarity in their professions. The deficit became all the more obvious during the first year and a half of the Orbán government, when the consequences of cleansing public institutions, even if thousands were concerned, fell upon individuals who could

not join together to speak in their own defense. Others focused on the weakness of the watchdog quality of the Hungarian media and wished to fill the gap with some civil activities. And still others were upset specifically by the media law and the weakening of constitutional safeguards. There were many different interests but one common thrust: the rejection of the excesses committed by those in power and by the authorities.

Milla continued meeting weekly, sometimes even more than once, still with free entry for newcomers—people in their 20s or 30s, students, young intellectuals, and marginalized people. Typically they arrived one by one, caring little about whom they would meet. Many had known Juhász before without knowing that he was behind the Facebook page.



Photo 11.3. Mass demonstration in Budapest, October 23, 2012.
(Bálint Kaszics)

There was always a group of opinion leaders, frequently changing and restructuring according to charisma, individual appeal, and persistence. Those who saw in Milla a prospect or a means to their own ideals or aims had to be very patient. The meetings were based on the principles and practices of direct democracy. They often seemed endless, and many of the statements were inconsequential and of low intellectual or verbal quality. Decisions were made by a simple majority of those present. Sessions were moderated mostly by Juhász, who had the capacity to keep the

events in hand. Some report that he was very good at manipulation, while others say that he showed good tactical ability. All of them agree, however, that he was prepared for the sessions and knew what he wanted to achieve.

Juhász's main concern was not the result of each vote. He was more worried about the corruption of the civic character and the potential influx of provocateurs. He was watchful not to let anyone send in people in order to change the outcome of the votes. The role of admin gave him some security, as there was the group of intellectuals who attended the meetings regularly and who were on the same wavelength.

In time, the need for internal structural differentiation emerged. Anyone could propose an action and, if it was accepted, create a working group to implement it. One group was set up for demonstrations, another one for the election of an alternative president of the republic, one for media freedom, etc. In March 2011, Milla set up a working group for strategic thinking, and another one with veto power in case a political party or other external power should try to manipulate the voting process. Otherwise, the principles of basic democracy and spontaneity prevailed. There was one important exception: at end of summer 2012, Milla helped set up *Millamédia*, a community news outlet. A regular stipend for the editors was even raised. But Milla never had any reliable financial resources. The costs of the first demonstrations were covered by collection on the spot.

A Third Type of Movement

Civic organizations and movements ideally serve to correct dysfunctions within liberal democratic systems. This institutional buildup has three main levels: (1) the owners and managers of resources (including the state), whose legitimacy is based upon growth of GDP; (2) redistributive welfare systems, where capital and labor accept self-limitation and compromise growth economies; and (3) systems of democratic representation through the parties and parliament.¹²

Civic organizations serve to bridge the gaps between this structure and the ever-changing needs of reality. Their "old model" goes back to the aftermath of World War II, related mainly to the second level of the above-mentioned structure. These civic organizations gave voice to well-defined social groups and interests and tried to channel them into the welfare system by harmonizing interests. The best examples are unions and charitable organizations.

The “new model,” which began about the end of the 1960s, was the fruit of developed capitalist societies. These organizations were related to the first level of the above structure and represented new values and interests including the environment, the role of women, peace, and human rights. These organizations did not strive for inclusion or participation in the official structures, but rather moved in the direction of self-government and self-representation. They did not seek compromises with the state, but acted in a context in which what counted was yes or no.

Milla belongs to a third type of civic organization and reacts to the deficiencies in the third (i.e., governmental) level of the overall institutional structure. Parliamentary democracies provide the space for an internecine fight between the system of checks and balances and the forces that aim to distort the system. Imbalance of power, populist temptations, pure party logic, individual or political corruption: these dangers confront every political system everywhere. The outcome of the fight depends on the strength of social and institutional resistance (the balancing powers, the media, democratic traditions, participation, public morals, etc.). In new democracies, such stabilizing forces are weak. In Hungary, the consolidation of the new political system was accompanied by a takeover by the political parties. It is widely thought that corruption gained momentum and partisan considerations advanced beyond public interests over the last 15 years. Milla was a reaction to this mounting feeling. Not an advocate of materialistic interests or postmaterialistic values, but rather a call for return to the principles of 1989: the new movement aimed to bridge the widening gap between society and politics.

Obviously, the birth of Milla through Facebook was not completely independent of recent popular uprisings in Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia, or of the nearly contemporary Arab Spring and Occupy movements in Europe and the United States. These events resulted from a non-elite-led intrusion of society into the public political space. Nowhere were there any elaborate ideologies or programs. Spontaneity, freedom of participation and confusion were part of the nature of the phenomenon and gave it taste and appeal.

For some time after its birth, Milla shared these characteristics. But otherwise it differed considerably from those examples. It was different from the Occupy movements in that its focus was not on some social injustice (growing inequality and poverty) that cried out for legal measures and institutional reforms. At the beginning, Milla too had been very contextual and specific: a protest against the media law. But soon its discourse went beyond the specific subject matter, well into more abstract

generalities, and over time Milla drew attention to the functional disturbances of the whole setup of Hungarian democracy. Also, the political context (“opportunity structure”) was different from some of the above-mentioned cases. Compared to Ukraine, Egypt, etc., Milla emerged inside a functioning democracy, one where the declining quality of that democracy was not yet obvious for the whole of the society. This is in contrast to the Orange example; there was no revolutionary situation or mood in Hungary. (The activists of Milla understood this very quickly: they quickly gave up on an initial idea to demonstrate constantly until the withdrawal of the media law.)

What about Politics?

The answer to this question is complex. Firstly, “it is the error of the system. We would have had no Milla had there been a good press, full democracy, and an active civil society,” says art historian András Rényi, a leading figure among the intellectuals of the movement. In other words, Milla was there to replace the missing watchdogs. Secondly, the contradiction could not be ignored. “Milla is civil and political at the same time. It is the political movement of the citizens. In normal situations, politics is up to the political parties and not to civic organizations. If they want, they can exert pressure with the mediation of the parties. In our case, however, Milla was created in place of the missing political forces. But it does not want to become a party. And rightly so. Civilians should not have a party.”

Thirdly, we can approach the problem from the point of view of *society*. The social experiences that gave rise to Milla were corruption, *l’art pour l’art* opposition and political bargaining under the cover of democracy. Milla stepped up with some understanding of society and the good thereof in general, without wishing to act instead of or on behalf of this very society or pretending to have a concept of what might be taken for its good. Milla was *political* when pointing at the deficiencies in the system of representation and the harmful consequences of Fidesz’s power building. At the same time, it remained *apolitical* by refusing to draw up political platforms and appeals for the coming elections. Milla, if it wanted to keep to its identity, *had to remain in between*. It was born with the idea of society at large: it could not limit itself to the idea of one part of—or one partial platform for—this same society. As a consequence, Milla *could not* become a political party.



Photo 11.4. Péter Juhász, the admin of the Milla FB group.
(Courtesy of Gabriella Csoszó)

The Break

Several times in the course of 18 months, Milla drew many tens of thousands of people to the street. Moreover, *only* Milla was able to achieve this. Its demonstrations became the main events for the masses wishing to express support for political change. But Milla got caught up in its own successes. Its responsibilities grew, and it was confronted by ever-growing expectations. These expectations had shrunk by 2014. A large portion of the public was no longer focused on a general renewal of politics or the reinforcement of civil control. It was more interested in the imminent task: to replace Fidesz. In order to achieve this, ran the prevailing opinion, an alliance of forces was needed. From this point of view, Milla's reticence and its civil attitude seemed definitely harmful. There was strong pressure for it to openly stand for its *de facto* political role and join forces in an anti-Orbán coalition.

Such expectations were based upon a shallow acquaintance with Milla and a superficial analysis of the situation. The political experts who filled the studios and the media columns did not see that what Milla was doing was not organizing so much as building a *platform*. In the autumn of 2012, Milla was first of all a lively language, an expanding sphere of culture, an approach, a mentality, a feeling. *Millamédia* promised a new dynamic for the process of forming. In actual fact, Milla was mainly a *call*. As an organization, it was nothing else than a "demonstration-organizing agency" (in the words of Rényi). It was able to call for mass demonstrations on the basis of its civil and cultural credibility. But it was not a real organization. As soon as someone wanted to change the situation and make Milla a formalized rigidity, its life and spirit would disappear. This was not understood from the outside, and even the most involved members of Milla could offer no clear predictions about what would follow from the changes.

The critical moment was the invitation of Gordon Bajnai¹³ to the demonstration of October 23, 2012. Milla then began a downward slope. More precisely, the break might have happened somewhat before. The Juhász interviews showed the switch. From his former antipolitical civil position, he kept moving toward "civil politics," which is an important change, whatever the term meant for him. Later he shifted even further, to the idea that any civil politics should be logically and practically preceded by change at the top of the state. Juhász seemed overwhelmed by the moral pressure exerted on him from outside the organization, the insistence emerging from Milla's social and political environment.



Photo 11.5. Mass demonstration in Budapest, October 23, 2012.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

What happened? Milla, born as a civil platform for the defense of freedoms and to accommodate some antielite and antipolitical feelings and ambitions, suddenly found itself in the middle of a very dense political space. Nobody had been prepared for such a turn of events. Some say that Milla did not have a “Plan B.” But neither had it ever developed a “Plan A,” or any other way of standing up to the challenges it faced. In Milla’s “strategic group,” there were some politically minded people whose joining of the movement had originated in some political ideas and aims. Two main positions emerged from these chaotic internal discussions: one was that of the *government changers*, who wanted to join forces with others and with Bajnai, and to define the role and character of Milla in such an alliance; the other position was of a *third way* (no Fidesz and no post-communists), whose adherents wished to keep the priority on the construction of civil society and civil control, and to create a new political elite and a new political style. The proponents of the second position wanted to join forces with LMP, 4K!, and Solidarity. Both these positions were charismatically present in Milla, but neither of them was dominant enough to be adopted and hence compulsory for the whole. The nonhierarchical, spontaneous, and participatory democratic character of Milla made any such development impossible and even inconceivable. Some

wished in vain to turn Milla into a political *project*. But it was unsuitable for that, and moreover, it had no plans for the future. Milla was not even able to conduct profound and unhurried discussions about the situation it faced and what it might be able to do about it.



Photo 11.6. Mass demonstration in Budapest, October 23, 2012.
(Courtesy of Gabriella Csoszó)

Meanwhile, the environment formulated its demands and expectations quite precisely. Throughout the autumn, the left-liberal media were full of critical, severe, scandalized, and uncomprehending views. The contributors called on Juhász to assume his responsibility to others and to the larger cause. He was reproached for the fact that political parties were prohibited from bringing their symbols to the demonstrations and that their leaders were not invited to speak. Against these pressures, Juhász offered little defense. Some of his closest allies in Milla suggested that the March demonstration was the last in the old civil vein: the tens of thousands come always for more and more, and without growing radicalism, concreteness, and commitments there was no way to continue forward. This of course was an unverified theory. Juhász, however, did not have the theoretical and strategic self-confidence to stand up to the external or internal opinion leaders or to trust the strength of his civil thought. Or had he changed his opinion? Or had he been persuaded? Whatever the case,

Milla did not choose to continue its path alone. Such an option seemed too morally risky and not beneficial for the future of the movement. (On a personal level, all this is quite comprehensible, and this is the other side of the same story. Milla's leading figures, especially Juhász, were a bit like Chaplin in *Modern Times* when he took hold of a flag and unwittingly found himself at the head of a demonstration. In half a year, an entire movement had grown, quite unexpectedly, out of a Facebook page. This movement attracted great masses, got into the middle of a political fight, often against itself, and needed guidance. Nobody was prepared for the role.)

Juhász's uncertainties might have been enhanced by the fact that he also began to see Milla through a political lens. He increasingly convinced himself—and let himself be convinced—that Milla, and he himself, might possess a political future. In such a context, the professional expertise that seemed to be present in Bajnai's think tank, the Patriotism and Progress Public Policy Foundation, was impressive. Milla was far from having such capacities. Unless forces could be united, it appeared that Milla's own internal resources would seem shallow to the others in the fight for the power. It might lose its agency role, and, not having much internal professional capacity, its influence might shrink to insignificance.

In the end, Milla could not withstand the pressure that came from Bajnai, from the larger environment, and from some of its own ringleaders. With former president of the republic László Sólyom as a speaker for the demonstration in October, Milla could have postponed the difficult decision or sought to escape the pressure completely. In this case, it could have done without the former minister of the last Gyurcsány government, however sympathetic and politically acceptable he was. But Sólyom did not accept the invitation. So, Milla walked into the trap. Interestingly enough, not even the opponents of a quick joining of forces thought that the demonstration was a watershed. "The demonstration went very well; Bajnai gave a good speech," the Milla people keep saying, even at the time of writing, adding that after the event things remained yet to be seen.

This was of course an illusion. The media and everyone from outside Milla saw the event as the coming out of Bajnai. From that point, the announcement of a new political party was only a matter of time. Bajnai was the last speaker (he spoke 37 minutes instead of the 15 agreed upon), and Milla and Solidarity preceded him seemingly to warm up the crowd. (Some asked Juhász to speak last, but allegedly he was worried that the crowd would not listen to him after Bajnai spoke.) So, the platform turned into a pulpit. The crowd had gathered on the invitation of Milla but left as

the people of Bajnai. By the October 23 demonstration, everything had changed.

Downslope

Following October 23, the ideal of a civil movement grew dimmer and political urges moved to the fore. “I was sure that in the case of an alliance, the agenda would be dictated by Bajnai’s group, we would be at their mercy, the idea of a third way would fade away completely and finally we would be embraced by the MSZP,” says Csigó.

The first big blow, a decisive one, came from LMP, which at its November congress refused to join Together 2014 (E2014), the movement and later association (and today political party) led by Bajnai, of which Milla and Solidarity were the cofounders. With that, Milla’s chance at a third way disappeared. Juhász and his friends found themselves stuck in post-Gyuresányist space. Many former activists left. Some were frightened by the prospect of a compromise with the MSZP, while others became disappointed by the loss of civil ideals.



Photo 11.7. Peter Juhász, Gordon Bajnai, and Péter Kónya announce the formation of E2014, October 23, 2012. (Courtesy of Gabriella Csoszó)

E2014 reacted positively to the MSZP's invitation to talk, and a meeting was held on January 2, 2013, to discuss positions pertaining to the issue of the constitution. This event confirmed all worries. It was held behind closed doors, with Péter Bárándy, a former minister of justice representing E2014 on the one side, and his son, Gergely Bárándy, heading the MSZP delegation on the other side. By participating, E2014 had shifted its previous position. Milla offered no explanation for not sending a delegation to the meeting, though it was in fact represented through its link to E2014. Péter Molnár, a media expert, former liberal politician and the only Milla activist present, raised some criticisms about the secrecy and poor preparation of the discussions. He was asked to refrain from these comments because he was not officially a member of the E2014 delegation. This reaction to his comments did not, to say the least, raise the morale of Milla.

Somewhat later, E2014 was transformed into a political party. Milla's participation in the party formation reflected its basic lack of concepts and strategies. Bajnai and his people met with Juhász and some others regularly, keeping them under continuous pressure. In January 2013 came the invitation to announce the party formation together with Patriotism and Progress and Solidarity. József Gulyás, a sociologist and former SZDSZ politician, was very skeptical about the developments. He realized that there were precious few clear ideas on the side of Bajnai, his think tank notwithstanding. Milla seemed even more feeble, its actions clearly based on a limited analysis of the situation. Gulyás tried to warn his people that "party formation has its consequences. The civil line will have to be left behind, and everything will appear in a different light. The decision is serious and should be considered carefully." Gulyás asked his audience some questions: "Why do we need a party so quickly? What guarantees do we have against post-MSZP dominance? Why do we not concentrate on those voters who would abstain from a satellite left-wing party? What will be better solved by the new party? What missions can we not fulfill in the coming months unless we become a party? Can we truly justify such a move? What will happen to the identity of Milla? Apart from Juhász, who else can represent Milla in the new party? What weight will be given to Milla in the new party? Will we be able to influence decisions? What will happen with the Milla stage?"

Milla's assembly first voted against the announced party formation, but nothing was cleanly settled. Patriotism and Progress kept meeting with Juhász and others, who by then were on the defensive. They did not see any alternative but to continue on the path chosen on October 23. They

felt forced to move. “By and large, Juhász’s message was that we had a *communication problem* and we did not know what to say,” said Gulyás.

On February 24, the assembly approved a so-called “centaur strategy,” which was again a typically illusory, middle-way solution. By this time, Milla thought that it should not oppose the creation of E2014 as a political party nor restrict the participation of its own activists in it. Those who wanted to join could form a platform in the party, but the name of the platform could not refer to Milla. At the same time, Milla’s civil wing would push the civil idea further, which was the original mission of the group.

Summer 2013

Milla kept losing momentum, as it had since late 2012. The majority of its followers were averse to the political role and the growing importance of political considerations. Many of them just stayed away. There was also a loss of image and identity. It was only a bit of a surprise and a sign of a change of codes Juhász was seen in a suit at a meeting of E2014. But there was more than that. As copresident of the new party, he was obliged to oppose the liberalization of light drugs. Coming from a former drug activist, this was unexpected. “Juhász should have kept his original image. No one is interested in a salesman. The *enfant terrible* was much better,” said Bori Takács, thinking that what had happened was distressing to those who expected Milla to support and advocate cultural alternatives and certain lifestyles.

Until the formation of E2014, Milla was something in between a group and a movement that was getting its moving forces, energies and ideas from below, from its public and from activists. The role of Juhász and the other central figures was mainly to help articulate the ideas and to keep the forces together. After October 2012, however, all the attention turned toward the new center: E2014. The ideas and decisions were expected to come from there. The relevant question was again “Who are we and what for?” An internal discussion paper from May 2013 runs like this: “Today the main problem is that Milla and the people of Milla lost their identity within E2014. This is at the root of the frustration of those of who joined the party and of those who did not... Juhász and Milla are interesting and valuable only if they can mobilize and serve with extra energy. It is not interesting if we go all around the country with Kónya, Tímea Szabó¹⁴ or Bajnai. The important thing is what we

can say for the media!... Therefore, I would spend more energy on developing content for ourselves!” This text is a sign of the changes. From that time on, Milla had to be invented. The movement, originally a spontaneous outbreak of energies and ambitions, had to be henceforth stimulated and kept alive from above. From now on, the center had to conceptualize content for a platform whose message and character had formerly been clear to everyone. Sit down and invent: this was the new task, and obviously a nearly impossible one.

Finally, the most difficult practical and political problem was—and is!—the role and situation of Juhász. He was the one who created Milla. His example had proved the incredible possibilities of a single person in the electronic age, if acting for a good cause, at the right moment, with the necessary energy and in the right manner. He built up a loose structure and communication network that worked amazingly well. At the same time, however, this organization hinged on him and his energy. Without Juhász, the civil part of the centaur was lost. The need remains for someone who is able to organize, unify, direct and switch. The presence of the admin is necessary. And that is the problem. His party political activities draw Juhász away. The motor is no longer there, and this weakens both Milla and Juhász. His value and credibility in the eyes of E2014 and of the political technocrats of Patriotism and Progress are based on the belief the large civil network believed to be behind him. Is this network still there? Does it still exist? One insider summarizes the feelings of today: “There is no more Milla, either within E2014 or outside it. Juhász uses only the memory of it. Sad story.”

Epilogue

To overcome the postcommunist period: what does it mean? Most importantly it probably means that politics ought to be based on a lively civil society and function under its control. In other words, politics ought not be the exclusive plaything of the elite. Fidesz carried out a “revolutionary” takeover. It created its own elite and replaced the old one with it. And so Orbán’s political opposition prepares a counterstrike. It wants to see a restoration of the former situation. Its conceptual framework goes no further than “good government” and a reexchange of the elite. Milla was trying something else. It was a spontaneous civil experiment aimed at taking back politics. It wanted to bring things under civil control. The reason for its failure was perhaps that the larger public, the intellectuals,

and even those within Milla itself did not fully grasp the essence of the experiment. They did not fully understand what was at stake. Without a largely shared understanding, however, it is impossible for even the most able and committed people to create a strong civil society.

Notes and references

- 1 For details, see András Tóth's piece on the LMP in chapter 12 of this book.
- 2 In reference to Ferenc Gyurcsány, the former MSZP prime minister, who left the party and formed his own parliamentary group with others who left.
- 3 The interviews were done with almost the same people on two occasions: during the summer of 2012 and in May 2013.
- 4 This text was reproduced verbatim from an article by Gábor Gavra on the online news site hirszerzo.hu.
- 5 For further details, see chapter 10 in this book by János Boris and György Vári.
- 6 Péter Csigó, "Nincs demokratikus ellenzék" [There is no democratic opposition], *Nem tetszik a rendszer?! (blog)*, January 9, 2012, http://nemtetszikarendszer.blog.hu/2012/01/09/nincs_demokratikus_ellenzek (accessed August 22, 2014).
- 7 For more details on Protect the Future, the association and environmental defense think tank, see chapter 12 in this book by András Tóth; for more on HaHa, see chapter 13 by Alexandra Zontea.
- 8 *Lebontott demokrácia, kormányozhatatlan ország*, March 2, 2012.
- 9 The first Orbán government was in office from 1998 to 2002, which was followed by a two-term period with a majority led by the MSZP from 2002 to 2010.
- 10 Péter Csigó, "Túl balon és jobbon: a radikális demokratikus megújulás pólusa a közvéleményben" [Beyond Left and Right: public opinion about the pole of radical democratic renewal], *Nem tetszik a rendszer?! (blog)*, July 16, 2012, http://nemtetszikarendszer.blog.hu/2012/07/16/csigo_peter_tul_balon_es_jobbon_a_radikalis_demokratikus_megujulas_polusa_a_kozvelemenyenben_i_resz (accessed August 22, 2014).
- 11 Péter Csigó, "Mit akarnak a politikailag bizonytalan internetezők? 6 tézis" [What do the politically uncertain Internet users expect? 6 thesis], *Nem tetszik a rendszer?! (blog)*, August 8, 2012, http://nemtetszikarendszer.blog.hu/2012/08/08/mit_akarnak_a_politikailag_bizonytalan_internetezok_6_tezis (accessed August 22, 2014).
- 12 Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 817–68.
- 13 Gordon Bajnai was a former minister and prime minister under the MSZP majority from 2009 to 2010, and more recently leader of E2014.
- 14 Péter Kónya, was president of Solidarity; Tímea Szabó was a member of Dialogue for Hungary (PM), a group that split from LMP to later join E2014.

The Rise of the LMP Party and the Spirit of Ecological Movements

András Tóth

The aim of this chapter is to tell the tale of a relatively coherent cohort of young, educated, smart, optimistic, enthusiastic, and well-intentioned people who established a political party aimed at overcoming the cold-war-like divisions of Hungarian politics in order to achieve a democratic renewal in tune with the ideological worldview of progressive contemporary ecopolitics.

The changing fortunes, the rapid turnings of scenes, the emergence of new challenges, the unfolding of ideological and personal conflicts that arose while this civic movement turned into a real political party take the form of a Greek tragedy. One of the challenges in writing up such a complicated, heroic and, at the same time, sad story is how to put all shades of the drama into a few pages—not to mention the lack of talent of a Greek tragedian! The other difficulty is to portray at the same time the tragedy of Hungarian society and the pitfalls of the post-socialist Hungarian political system, which led to the decomposition of the balanced Hungarian democratic system envisioned by the founding fathers of post-socialist Hungary during the velvet negotiations in the last days of dying state socialist rule.

Being done by a professional academic, the task is even more complicated, as simply writing the story is not sufficient; it has to be framed into a relevant academic discourse for the advancement of theoretical knowledge. Politics Can Be Different (LMP) itself is a complex phenomenon. As with any complex phenomenon, it can be placed into many theoretical frames.

One of the most obvious frames is the analysis of LMP as the Hungarian version of a new left or new social movement type of organization, born as a response to the crisis of the old left. LMP was born when the third way of the old left, which tried to combine pro-market-economy

liberal policies with universal welfare state spending, sputtered to its inglorious end in the wake of the credit crunch. In response to the crisis of the old left, a new style of antiglobalization/anticapitalist criticism was embraced by a young generation of progressive social reformers, who advanced a radical new democratic vision based on a combination of human rights, local self-sustaining communities (rather than integration into global capitalism), and demand for a universal welfare state. A related concept is that LMP tried to formulate, to use the framework of Katsiaficas,¹ a new ideology of world history, a new universal worldview based on merging elements of ecology, old left, new left, and liberal concepts in the post-Marxist world, in which socialism and laborism are viewed as outdated or even taboo in the context of the post-socialist environment, where socialism is equated with the terror and horrors of Stalinist regimes. LMP in this sense may be seen as an attempt to create a new ideology, a new political pole, which to a certain extent continues the capitalist critique of Marxism and aims to end capitalist exploitation without uttering the name of Marx. It seeks structural change through a new grand narrative envisioning a limited market based on locality, solidaristic cooperation, environmental care, and sustainability—without speaking of socialism. The story of LMP in this related context tells us how difficult it was to establish a new pole despite the fact that an unexpected crisis had shaken up the established political order and opened up the political opportunity structure in a *crisis interregnum*, to use the expression of Gramsci,² for new ideas and parties.

A different approach is to analyze LMP in the framework of competing left- and right-wing revolutionary platforms offering millennial redemption and rejuvenation in wake of the perceived collapse of the established order. The key peculiarity of the post-credit-crunch situation is that the antioligarchic and anticapitalist, or at least anti-global-capitalist (and revolutionary communitarian pro-welfare) platform of LMP was not the only revolutionary platform on the political scene. Not that the moderate old left was the real competitor to LMP's left-leaning revolutionary platform; the real competitors were on the other side of the political map: the right. The radical right-wing Jobbik and the radicalizing center-right Fidesz alike called for—openly, in the case of Jobbik, and tacitly, in that of Fidesz—a radical remaking of the post-socialist Hungarian model based on a critique of neoliberalism, oligarchic corruption, foreign dependence and rising debt orchestrated by foreign financial circles. It envisioned a more communitarian, pro-welfare state model in nationalistic guise. In this chapter, I try to answer why the revolutionary offering of the ecological

left-oriented LMP was the least successful among the many revolutionary platforms in the electoral competition.

A further twist is that the story of LMP did not end at its moment of success in establishing a political foothold. The real tragedy of LMP unfolded only after the elections, when it found itself between two pagans and was forced to choose one of them in order to defeat the other. This metaphor of being between two pagans is a reference to a historical trap situation that developed in the 17th century. In the 17th and 18th centuries, part of Hungary was occupied by the Ottoman Turks, while another part was under Habsburg control. Hungarians, many among them Protestant, who wanted freedom and an independent Hungary, characterized their situation as being between two pagan powers: the Catholic Habsburgs and the Muslim Turks. As they alone did not have enough might to combat the two large powers simultaneously, they were faced with the uneasy decision of which pagan was the least dangerous as an ally against the other one. In the case of LMP, one of the pagans was the old left, with its liberal tendencies and historical baggage. The other was the right-wing Fidesz, which, in order to be able to execute its own revolutionary platform of reorganization, dismantled the checks and balances of the post-socialist political order and began to build up its own centralized illiberal oligarchic power system. LMP attempted to launch a new revolt in the name of democracy and the universal welfare state against the revolutionary shake-up of the democratic order. Failing to build enough support on its own, LMP was forced to choose between one of the pagans. This uneasy choice led to the breakup of the party and divided the originally coherent and cohesive group into foes and political enemies. This new failure of revolution (this time against another revolution) leads to the same question as the first one: why did the ecological left-oriented revolution fail to drum up support, while Fidesz's nationalistic revolutionary platform overwhelmingly succeeded to maintain its electoral base?

The structure of the chapter is as follows: first I tell the story of LMP from its predecessor movements to the breakup of the party in 2013. In the conclusion I try to answer why the ecological left-oriented ideological position suffered a tragic defeat at the hands of the nationalistic revolutionary platform of the right despite the heroic efforts and immense goodwill of so many young, enthusiastic, and intelligent people.

Beginnings: The Green Movement

In the 1980s, in the final decade of the crumbling socialist regime, the first illegal and semilegal green movements and debating circles became established in various universities in Budapest and in the larger cities outside it. These green circles were part of the loosely connected networks of the wider democratic opposition movements. Among the green circles, the Danube Circle (Duna Kör) gained national importance. The Danube Circle had been established by a handful of activists to protest the construction of the Gabčíkovo (Bős) Dam across the Danube. The Danube Circle organized the first mass protest rally since 1957, and forced the government to back down and repudiate the plan to build the dam in the final days of socialist regime.³

It is important to note that the opposition to the socialist regime of the green movement had a lasting impact on the political position of older green activists. They remained suspicious of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the leading left-wing force, as this party was the heir organization to the ruling socialist party. Additionally, the coalition of the MSZP and the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) also distanced the green activists from the left-liberal camp, as the SZDSZ was seen as the main promoter of unbridled capitalism and the market economy, which were associated with a careless consumption-oriented culture and environmental destruction.⁴

There were discussions within the Danube Circle as to whether to set up a green party during the transition period of 1988–1989. But the core green activists did not like the idea of politicization and wanted to develop a strong, professional and locally organized green movement aimed at protecting the environment.⁵ In turn, those activists who were more interested in political activity increasingly became activists in the nascent democratic political parties: some in Fidesz, some in the SZDSZ, and some in the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the then dominant right-wing political force. Thus, those who played with the idea of establishing a green party had to realize that the lack of a clear political ideology and that of a clear political stance among activists rendered the conversion of the movement into a political party most unlikely, if not downright impossible.⁶

The 1990s saw the development and self-organization of green movements and associations. The loose-knit green movement became one of the most important and largest civil movements in Hungary and accumulated considerable organizational resources and lobbying power.⁷ The green movement also integrated itself into the pan-European networks of

green movements and developed connections with EU-level environmental agencies and organizations.⁸

In parallel, an ecopolitical studies program had been launched at Eötvös Loránd University led by András Lányi, who became one of the most vocal opinion leaders in the early 1990s. Key activists of the future LMP enrolled in this university program and were influenced by their studies there.⁹

Lányi is a key figure whose societal and political vision influenced the political ideas of the future LMP. Lányi joined the Danube Circle in 1988; for him, blocking the building of the dam was as important as demolishing the dictatorship of the socialist regime. He hoped that the transition would result in a more human, more democratic, and more solidaristic societal model. Lányi developed an all-encompassing socioeconomic program for ecological movements in the mid-1990s. This program aimed to go beyond the traditional green-movement issues of reestablishing balance between nature and civilization. It argued for a locally sustainable economic model as the basis for the renewal of local communities, the achievement of solidarity, and a means of safeguarding culture and the environmental legacy. The program called for limiting the fierce competition for power in politics as well as suppressing the cruel competition of the market. The main goal of Lányi's ecopolitics was to develop a deliberative policy-making process that would make it possible for the political camps to reach compromises that might achieve the common good. The program called for the decentralization of political decision making to avoid the impersonal mechanism of politics. Lányi was increasingly alienated from the controversial reality of the emerging new market economy. He blamed the misdevelopment of the country on the grip on power held by the oligarchic elite of the late socialist regime, and later maintained by the resurgent MSZP and the doctrinaire neoliberal SZDSZ. He argued that these parties had derailed the ideas of systematic change as well as ethical and political rejuvenation. Lányi also viewed with increasing alarm the governing practices of the right-wing parties led by Fidesz between 1998 and 2002. In his view, Fidesz continued the power-hungry politics of the left-liberal political elite, built its own oligarchic system, continued submitting Hungary to the global industrial machinery, and did not care about ecopolitics at all. Deeply disappointed with Fidesz's policies, Lányi asserted that the time had come to develop an ecopolitical alternative to the established political camps of left and right. He argued for a new political alternative, one able to embrace right-, liberal-, and left-leaning people, provided they cared about a sustainable future.¹⁰

The Predecessor: Protect the Future (2000 to 2006)

Lányi in 2000 called for the establishment of Protect the Future (Védgyelet) in response to the environmental catastrophe caused at the Alburnus Maior gold mine in Transylvania, Romania. But Protect the Future had a wider goal than to protest against one catastrophe. Lányi imagined Protect the Future to be the beginning of a wider movement calling for a reconstitution of politics and economy in Hungary and to provide a new ecopolitical vision for the country.

Protect the Future had organized a number of successful actions and campaigns between 2000 and 2006 that had garnered a high media profile. The most important of these supported the candidacy of László Sólyom, the former president of the Constitutional Court, to be president of Hungary. In a deadlock among parliamentary parties, Protect the Future managed to get Sólyom elected president with the support of Fidesz and some SZDSZ members, and against the will of the MSZP. During these campaigns, Protect the Future built a wide network of connections with local green movements, local governments, political parties, civic movements, and professional organizations. The successes boosted the activists' self-esteem and created organizational cohesiveness. The fame also nurtured new streams of activists. Protect the Future became the meeting point for different generations of politically active people. Among them, the older activists of the green movements, who generally leaned toward the right (insofar as they had some antipathy toward the parties of the left-liberal coalition), and a younger generation of activists, who leaned toward new-leftist ideas, had participated in various new-left-oriented antiglobalization movements or organizations and were at the same time attracted by ideas of sustainable non-market-based development. For many left-wing-oriented young activists, the language of ecopolitics meant a new modern language through which they could express their anticapitalist and democratic ideas without referring to the antiquated and delegitimized Marxist or socialist language of the old left. Ecopolitics allowed them all to distinguish themselves from the technocratic and neoliberal old left and from the populist conservative right.¹¹ Additionally, Protect the Future also provided a home for those young political activists for whom the liberal concept of human rights was a main concern but who were alienated from the liberal SZDSZ due to its neoliberal market-oriented policies.

Protect the Future also attracted those from the moderate right who did not like the political populism of Fidesz and embraced the ecological viewpoint.¹² The wide political profile of activists and supporters seemed an advantage at this phase, when Protect the Future acted as a civic or-

ganization. Protect the Future also became a kind of meeting place for leading public intellectuals who participated in conferences, presented lectures, and prepared policy papers in wide-ranging areas of public interest from education to foreign policy.¹³

The organizational life of Protect the Future was based on the principles of deliberative democracy, direct democracy, and consensus-oriented decision making. Anybody could participate in any decision-making procedure. This type of functioning offered an open door to any activists who wanted to play a greater role in decision-making processes and attracted many younger activists who detested the hierarchical organizations of the traditional political parties.¹⁴

Since the beginning, there was the question as to whether Protect the Future should be converted into a proper green party. But the majority of older activists from environmental movements and public intellectuals resisted the temptation of politicization.¹⁵ For Lányi, the time came in 2004 to organize a proper green party out of Protect the Future. Already the campaign to elect László Sólyom to be president of Hungary in early 2005 served as a springboard for profiling the future of the political party. The campaign launch event was organized under the banner "Politics Can Be Different." The campaign organizers chose a rainbow for its colors to signal the wish to overcome political divisions between left and right. The manifesto of the campaign described an apocalyptic picture of the state of political life: the rule of law in danger, a country on the verge of moral collapse, and, behind the facade of representative democracy, a bitter struggle within the political class and its bourgeois interests to secure power and public resources for its own corrupt(ed) benefit.

During the campaign, Lányi initiated talks with green organizations and various circles close to the political right about the setup of a new green political party. These background negotiations resulted in a storm within Protect the Future. The younger activists oriented toward the new left and human-rights-centered liberalism were against openness toward the conservative right. They wanted to follow the new-left-oriented policy line of European green movements, while Lányi leaned to the right owing to his antipathy toward the old left.¹⁶ The internal division ended with Lányi and his close followers leaving Protect the Future.

Lányi did establish a new party, Human Chain for Hungary, but this party failed in the 2006 elections.¹⁷ Lányi later attributed the failure to the fact that the 2006 elections were the last elections in which contesting parties based their campaign strategies on reckless welfare populism, leaving no space for more cautious voices.¹⁸ Observers attributed the failure of

this green party to socioeconomic causes, such as the lack of a broad and affluent middle class with postmaterialist values.¹⁹ After the electoral failure, Lányi withdrew from political life.

The Perfect Storm in 2006 and the Road toward the Formation of LMP (2006 to 2010)

The outbreak of the political storm after the 2006 elections changed the situation. The collapse of the left-liberal coalition and parties ended the deadlock of the political system and opened space for new parties.²⁰ The intertwined nature of the Hungarian and global crises provided a lift to the ecological ideology, which argued against crude globalized capitalism and called for locally based noncompetitive development. Finally, the perception of a deep political, ethical and economic crisis activated the political will of future key organizers to form a political party that would be able to provide a way out for Hungarian society. They hoped that this would also make it possible to redress the mistakes of the derailed system and create a new, more democratic, more human, more equal, and more solidaristic social and economic system, one that would be environmentally friendly and thus define a sustainable economic model.²¹

The key activists increasingly viewed Hungarian political life with disdain. They perceived that the mainstream parties had run out of steam and that their spirit, which had enabled the democratic transition, had dissipated. They felt that it had become paramount to provide a third choice, which would extend beyond technocratic (i.e., the left-liberal camp led by the MSZP and the SZDSZ) and populist (i.e., the Fidesz-led right-wing camp) political offerings. They wanted a third choice that could not be classified into the existing political camps of left or right, but an ecopolitical one that would be critical of globalization and offer a radically democratic alternative.²² The political goal for the ecopolitical party would not be to bridge the difference between left and right and hammer out a compromise between them; it would rather create a third choice based on a synthesis of conservative, liberal, and left-oriented values. This synthesis would unite the liberal concepts of human rights and the rule of law with the leftist value of caring for the poor, the needy, and the weak. From the right, the essence of conservatism was also adopted into this synthesis through the revival of the original Burkean concept in an ecological context, namely a policy process which would cautiously reform any major institution in order to ensure long-term sustainability.²³

The Road toward Party Formation

The dramatic events of autumn 2006 brought the activists who remained with Protect the Future to the fore and gave voice to their protest. András Schiffer, probably the most influential among the activists, condemned the SZDSZ in an interview for holding highbrow moral judgments while maintaining an immoral political compromise with the MSZP. Schiffer warned that the ethically fallen political leaders would compromise human-rights liberalism and open the door for Fidesz to gain power, and that the party would use the same reprehensible methods as did the MSZP and the SZDSZ once they were again in power.²⁴

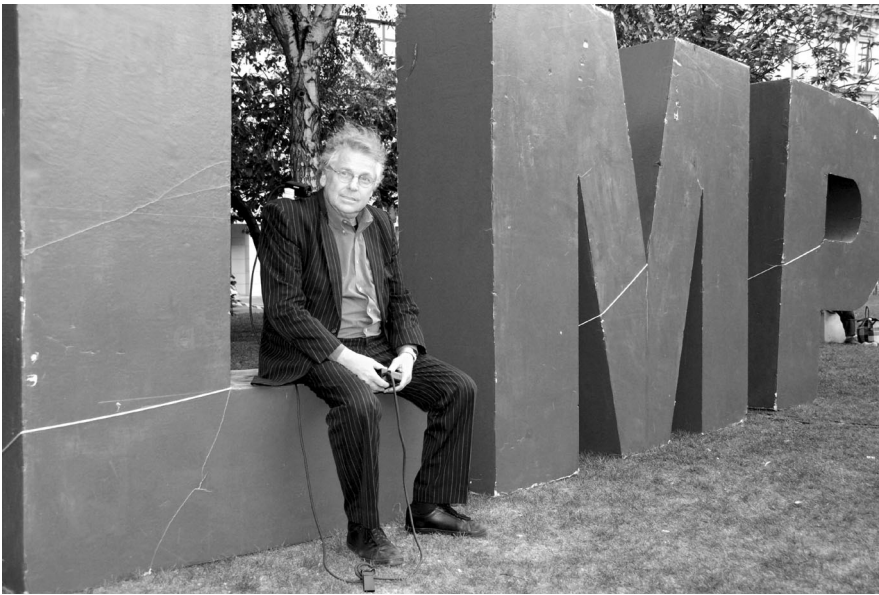


Photo 12.1. Daniel Cohn-Bendit as guest of LMP, May 2008.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

Once again, the discussion as to whether to form a new party began among the key activists. In summer 2007, the key activists—including András Schiffer, Péter Rauschenberger, and Benedek Jávor—determined that within a few months they would decide. In autumn 2007, a wider circle of activists and supporters, about 20 people, spent a weekend in a country hotel to decide upon the issue of party formation. At the meeting, the participants were unanimous that a new party was needed. In one discussion, different positions emerged concerning the placement of the fu-

ture party on the political map. András Schiffer argued that the new party should be a synthesis between constitutional left and right positions, and it should form a third political pole, in the very center, and put forward an alternative based on ideologies of ecological sustainability and the rule of law. Péter Rauschenberger argued that the goal of the new party should be the renewal of the left. In his view, the new party should formulate a platform enabling it to be the major party of the left, taking the place of the decaying and increasingly delegitimized MSZP. The participants supported the position of András Schiffer, influenced in part by the positioning of the European green parties. But also, it was alluring to contemplate the synthesis of left and right, and through this the hope of overcoming the divisive cleavages of Hungarian political life.²⁵ They hoped that there would be political space for a new party that would offer an alternative to the failed left-wing position of the technocratic and neoliberal MSZP, as well as to the populist Fidesz, led by the charismatic Viktor Orbán.²⁶

It was decided at the meeting that throughout the year 2008, the key activists would see to the logistical, material, infrastructural, and financial aspects of the eventual party formation.²⁷ The party formation was given a boost in December 2007, when László Sólyom, the president of Hungary, expressed in an interview his opinion that the country needed a third, ecological green party that would be able to overcome the deep cleavage between left and right by synthesizing left and right values and at the same time embracing the concept of social care.²⁸ A number of closed Internet forums were then set up for the key activists to discuss issues and to facilitate the organizational work.

In March 2008, the Ecopolitical Workshop Foundation (ÖMA) was established to support the party formation process.²⁹ Surrounding the foundation was a wider group of 150–200 activists from various backgrounds, including green activists, human-rights activists, and social workers. They formed an informal group, Szimplakör. The task for this wider group was to position the would-be party, which would follow the ideological position, policies, and organizational practices of other European green parties. Yet beyond the narrower green environmental position would be demands for genuine democracy, the lessening of social inequality, and the assertion of a multicultural position that would take up the issues of human rights and the rule of law.³⁰

At the same time, there was a systematic attempt to create a wider network of supporters by organizing public conferences involving various NGOs. The *Elköltöztünk* blog was launched and immediately became the most important open online debating forum for the organizers and for

those interested in the formation of the new party. The blog regularly gave space for shorter and longer opinion pieces on ideological, organizational, and practical issues related to the party's formation. Lively online discussions ensued on major issues, helping form final positions on each of these issues.

It was felt by some that there was a great need to recreate the ethos of 1968 in Hungary given that the institutions of traditional democracy had faded and the need for rejuvenation was so pressing. A new postmodern democracy, which would inject life into representative democracy through direct democracy and the involvement of interested local and professional opinions in political decision making, would assure this process.³¹ This view was reflected in an article in the blog *Lehetmás*, which called for the rejuvenation of democratic institutions but rejected the idea of a new system change. The author warned that there are three major threats to democracy: (1) autocratic populism, which denies equal rights to citizens, (2) technocratic hubris, which does not give space for citizen involvement in political decision making, and finally (3) profit-oriented forces, which purchase political influence while denying democratic power to the citizens. The article argued that the following steps were required for the rejuvenation of Hungary:

1. Ensure and increase the scope of direct democracy
2. Reregulate party financing
3. Enact a more proportional electoral system to give smaller parties more of a chance to get into parliament
4. Assure transparency and freedom of information
5. Ensure accountability and strengthen checks and balances in order to weaken the political power of the government
6. Strengthen local governments and self-governance based on the principle of subsidiarity.³²

As the series of public discussions continued, the number of participants grew. With the palpable increase of interest, the key organizers found hope that they could launch a successful campaign for the forthcoming 2010 elections.³³ As a means of achieving greater participation, April 2008 saw the launch of the ÖMA newsletter, an electronic mailing list with a regular news service for those who gave their email addresses to the organizers.



Photo 12.2. LMP discussion evenings, November 2008. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

While the debating series went ahead in Budapest, András Schiffer was tasked with visiting the rural green movements, attending rock concerts, finding local activists, and involving them in the organization of the party. As one activist noted, “LMP grew out of András’s green-checked notebook.”³⁴ In the meantime, Peter Rauschenberger prepared the final draft of the platform based on in-person and online discussions.

As a consequence of the palpable support, the organizers became ever more committed to establishing the new party. The second issue of the *ÖMA* newsletter (April 2008) contained assertions that the time had come to act. In the final debating event (May 2008), the issue of whether to establish a new party under the classic green party slogan (“Neither left nor right, but ahead”) was discussed. According to the position paper for this discussion, 19th-century ideologies such as social democracy and conservatism were unable to address the challenges of the 21st century—including such issues as overconsumption, environmental degradation, increasing inequality, and the destruction of local cultures and communities. In Hungary, the distinction between left and right had lost its original meaning, it was asserted, since the concern of both sides is to grab power, the left often carrying out right-wing policies and the right echoing the call for typically left-wing policies. The time had come, the paper concluded, to organize an antiglobalization, ecopolitical, radically democratic alternative.³⁵

After the closing debate, an interview with András Schiffer was published in one of the most popular online news sites. Schiffer observed in the interview that the green party formed would not be a narrow one, but rather one with an all-embracing ideological position. This party would offer a salient solution for the creation of a new society based on solidarity, justice, and sustainable development. Schiffer made clear that the new party would be critical of capitalism. He observed that the time for such a party had come, since the global crisis had terminated the postsocialist euphoria over capitalism, and society now faced its hardships. This new situation offered the chance for a radically democratic alternative against the technocratic globalization and the inadequate positions of the other parties. The new radically democratic alternative represented by the new party would not only demand the rule of law but also ensure real equality through the correction of the market. Schiffer, citing opinion surveys, estimated that 30 percent of voters were seeking a third party, and he expressed his hope that the new party could be as strong as Fidesz or the MSZP in the new parliament.³⁶ The new initiative got major media attention, and public intellectuals made a number of favorable comments in various media.



Photo 12.3. LMP street action: talking to people in the street, October 2008.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

LMP was formally established as a political party on October 8, 2008. At the same time, the LMP website was launched, which published the party platform. The party declared a wider mission than a narrow green party: sustainable harmony between nature and humankind could only be established if there were no exploitation in human society and the assurance of a sustainable human society.³⁷

To finance its operations, the party launched a novel Internet campaign requesting donations through a website. It stated that the open donation process would provide a way of avoiding the danger of corrupt dealings with business circles.

The first goal of the party was to achieve success in the upcoming European Parliament elections, set for summer 2009. The party, learning from the successful Obama campaign, prepared an Internet-based campaign. It hoped to receive more than 5 percent of the vote, which would enable it to have at least one representative in the European Parliament. In the elections, however, LMP received only 2.65 percent of the vote. Nonetheless, they tried to mask the failure by boasting that they earned more votes than the SZDSZ.



Photo 12.4. András Schiffer (in dark suit behind the microphone) and the LMP leadership after the first LMP congress, September 20, 2009. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

As far as organizational strength was concerned, LMP counted 400 members, which later increased to around 800. The membership was concentrated in Budapest and in the major cities outside it. Typically, the party members belonged to the younger generation; its key leaders were in their 30s and had completed their university education. According to An-

drás Fischer, the membership was composed of three major sociological groups. One group was the former activists and supporters of the SZDSZ, who were attracted to the party based on liberal-lifestyle and human-rights issues but did not support its liberal economic policy position. The second group was composed of new-left-oriented people for whom societal justice was a key concern but who did not form part of the rearguard of the former dictatorial regime. Finally, the third group was composed of those moderate communitarian conservatives who did not like Fidesz's populist rhetoric, but who considered the defense of democratic values and self-regulation important.³⁸ It was hoped that these different groups would allow for the synthesis of values among left-, liberal-, and conservative-oriented ideological positions. It was also hoped that the ecopolitics would be the universalistic ideology that would embrace and include the various ideological strands in one unifying worldview.³⁹

The crucial challenge for the party came with the 2010 elections. In order to be able to have a national list, a party needed to field candidates in at least 27 constituencies. This represented a daunting task for a newly established party with relatively low levels of membership concentrated in a few bigger cities. No wonder that for many observers it was a surprise that LMP was able to field enough candidates to be able to present a national list for the elections. Some rumored that Fidesz helped the MDF to be able to field enough candidates in individual constituencies in order to weaken the MSZP and divide the votes on the left; these allegations were denied by LMP.⁴⁰ In the election campaign, the media generally represented LMP as the least harmful option to vote for. The name of the party alone was a magnet for disillusioned voters who were fed up with politics. LMP could also count on the possible votes of the former SZDSZ supporters, whose party support collapsed after the crisis.⁴¹

LMP got 384,000 votes in the 2010 elections, which amounted to 7.5 percent of the total and earned LMP 16 parliamentary seats. András Schiffer greeted the result as a miracle: a young party managing to get so many votes and entering as the first green party in parliament. He confidently said that a new generation would enter parliament and show that politics was not a rotten and dishonest business. After decades of hopelessness, LMP would be the party of hope.⁴²

András Schiffer was elected to be the head of LMP's parliamentary group. He was a key organizer of the party and played an intermediary role within the party between the new-left-oriented younger activists, typically based in Budapest, and the more conservative right-leaning activists living in the countryside.

In between Two Pagans: From Being a Halfhearted Opposition to the Call for New Resistance (April 2010 to December 2011)

The 2010 elections showed the extent to which the political balance had changed between left and right following the 2006 crisis. Fidesz remained the only party representing the center-right and got 262 seats, more than two-thirds of the total. The liberal center-right party, the MDF, which formed an electoral alliance with the liberal SZDSZ, did not get enough votes to earn a single seat in the new parliament. The MSZP's parliamentary group shrank from 170 to 59 members. And Jobbik, the radical right-wing party, became the third-largest party in parliament with 47 MPs.⁴³ The result showed the collapse of the left-liberal camp and the shift of the pendulum toward the right.

Opinion leaders generally expected the further decline of the MSZP in the face of the growing popularity of fresh, young, radical Jobbik and LMP. Péter Tölgyessy, one of the most influential public intellectuals, even played with the idea that LMP could take over the leading position on the left.⁴⁴

In internal discussions after the elections, the issue resurfaced as to whether to reposition the party on the left in an effort to displace the MSZP.⁴⁵ The example of Fidesz demonstrated that such a repositioning was not impossible.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the idea of synthesizing values and being in between the left and right was so strong that this repositioning did not take place. Also, LMP was not prepared to make the necessary compromises to be able to occupy the position of the MSZP. One example of this lack of compromise was experienced by the author of this chapter. In autumn 2010, LMP organized a workshop to discuss the situation of interest representation in the workplace. A number of key trade union leaders participated in the workshop, hoping to establish relationships with the ascending LMP. In his talk, however, András Schiffer harshly criticized the bureaucratic nature of trade unions and called for a bottom-up renewal of trade unions, failing to adopt the conciliatory tone needed for political accommodation.⁴⁷ It was no wonder that top union officials gave up on developing a close relationship with LMP and rebuked the criticism by stating that LMP had no clue about the realities of the world of work.

In any case, the constructive opposition role sounded lukewarm in the warfare-like political discourse that followed the 2010 elections. Parties took to bombarding each other daily with harsh criticisms. LMP's intellectual style of discourse was no match for Fidesz, whose leader, the char-

ismatic Viktor Orbán, is a forceful, energetic, manly⁴⁸ politician who is also adept at speaking in the direct language of everyday people.



Photo 12.5. LMP MP Ágnes Osztolykán: protest in front of the parliament building, December 23, 2011. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

This constructive and halfhearted oppositional role led to a common perception of LMP as lukewarm, and lessened the chance that it might replace the MSZP as the leading left-wing party or be perceived as the staunch opposition party of Fidesz in the eyes of left-wing voters.⁴⁹

However, the post-2010 period turned out to be different from LMP's expectations based on Fidesz's campaign messages.⁵⁰ Fidesz declared that the elections were in reality a revolution by electoral mandate, and that it was compelled to carry out a full-fledged revolutionary reorganization of the country. This forceful reorganization process effectively removed LMP from any sort of constructive opposition role.

As the government careened ahead with the conversion of the country solely on its own lines, LMP became increasingly critical and began to abandon the position of constructive opposition. LMP organized demonstrations against the curtailment of the rights of the Constitutional Court and against the monolithic adoption of the new constitution. In both cases, LMP claimed to counter parliamentary acts seen as offensive to the democratic system, noting that opposing them in parliament did not provide sufficient expression and that there was a need to organize external protest as well. Nonetheless, only a few hundred protesters participated in these demonstrations. In May 2011, LMP launched a process to have a referendum over the new labor code, which LMP deemed a liberal regulation that would come as a shock to employees and signaled the beginning of barracks capitalism.⁵¹

While LMP's capacity to mobilize support proved to be rather small, new civic movements sprung up at the same time, most notably One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) and the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity), which were able to mobilize much bigger demonstrations. A number of leading LMP politicians participated in the demonstrations organized by these new civic movements, and informal background talks began among activists about a possible collaboration against the government.⁵²

In November 2011, LMP reached a turning point in its relationship with Fidesz. A proposal by Fidesz for a new regulation concerning the functioning of parliament had been the last straw in the line of successive regulations that attacked and weakened the democratic institutional setup of the Hungarian system. In a press conference, András Schiffer protested against the new measure using a dramatic tone and argued that the new rule would convert parliament into a puppet theater. He noted that LMP had entered parliament in 2010 with the hope of playing a role in a deliberative policy-making process to create a new Hungary. But, in his view,

Fidesz opted for a one-sided policy and was not taking into account any constructive proposal coming from the opposition. Schiffer warned that his party saw the amendment as a *casus belli* and that it would end its constructive opposition policy if Fidesz persisted in forcing the draft bill.⁵³ The press conference was held jointly with the MSZP, which signaled the shift in LMP's position compared to 2010. Simultaneously, informal talks had intensified between Solidarity and LMP about possible cooperation in putting pressure on Fidesz to change its policy line. But Fidesz, as usual, did not take into account the protest of the opposition parties. On the day of the vote, December 23, 2011, a number of LMP MPs and activists chained themselves to the gates of Kossuth Lajos Square. After half a day of negotiations with the protesters, the police cut the chains and forcibly took the protesters to a police station. LMP called for a mass protest that evening in front of the parliament building. Around 5,000 protesters participated in that demonstration in what was arguably the largest demonstration event ever organized by LMP. In the demonstration, LMP called for "New Resistance" and declared that it would organize a protest movement for democratic renewal. Of all the speakers, the biggest ovation was given to Virág Kaufer, who was one of those who had chained themselves to the parliament building; she was let free just before the beginning of the demonstration. It seemed for the moment that LMP had found its Joan of Arc, a charismatic speaker so fundamental for successful modern mass politics.

Instead of New Resistance: Crisis and Split (December 2011 to February 2013)

Despite the success, an unplanned event at the demonstration served to confuse LMP. LMP had invited Solidarity to give a speech. Tamás Székely, the vice-president of Solidarity, without any prior consultation with LMP,⁵⁴ announced that Solidarity would be organizing an opposition roundtable for all democratic opposition parties⁵⁵ and social movements to work out a common electoral platform and hammer out an electoral coalition.

Tamás Székely's announcement came as a bolt from the blue for LMP. Until now, LMP was prepared to join only in a short-term technical coalition with the MSZP until the rule of law and majoritarian democracy could be restored. Moreover, LMP wanted to include only political parties in the technical coalition, not social movements.⁵⁶ The next day, the media

was full of speculation as to whether the MSZP, the various liberal circles, and former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány would be part of the roundtable. A number of civic organizations also signaled that they would like to be part of the roundtable and have a seat. Distinguished left- and liberal-leaning opinion leaders and public intellectuals expressed their support for the roundtable.



Photo 12.6. The police take away the chained LMP MPs, December 23, 2011.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

This half-baked and uncoordinated proposal opened a can of worms within LMP.⁵⁷ The proposal hit the most sensitive fault lines within the party: whether to go deeper into coalition with the MSZP or even with Gyurcsány, to maintain a solid position between left and right, or despite all measures by Fidesz, to lean toward the right. Accepting a seat at the roundtable would mean giving up the founding ethos of LMP, which was organized in opposition to the oligarchic neoliberal-leaning MSZP, not to speak of Gyurcsány, who represented much of what was abhorrent to many LMP activists in terms of ethically unacceptable political acts of lies and cheating.

The opening up of a debate over the strategic issues came at the worst possible moment for the party due to an accumulation of internal conflict among its leading activists. The party had been organized based on principles of direct democracy. Nonetheless, this model of organization proved

to be unworkable for a political party, for which constant new occurrences require immediate reactions and decisions. The conflicts arising from this utopian organizational setup placed a major psychological burden on nearly everyone involved. Additionally, the need for rapid reaction had reinforced the differences in personalities as well as political positions and intensified the internal competition among key figures within the party. This led to continuous and intensifying conflicts over competencies, political opinions, and political visibility. These internal conflicts were made worse by the fact that all LMP activists went through a very difficult period due to the wholesale changes imposed by Fidesz that were occurring in Hungary. LMP leaders experienced exclusion, failure, neglect, and inefficiency, whereas their hope had been to effectively contribute to building a new common democratic project for the country.⁵⁸



Photo 12.7. Virág Kaufer delivers her speech; behind her the LMP parliamentary group together for the last time, December 23, 2011. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

On the surface, the conflict was solved by the LMP congress in January 2012. The congress rejected participation in the roundtable process but gave way to negotiations with organizational forces that not only aimed to change the government but also were critical of the past actions that had led to Fidesz's two-thirds majority. At the proposal of András Schiffer, the congress also rejected an electoral coalition with the MSZP for the 2014 elections.

But personal conflicts also came to the surface. Virág Kaufer had stepped down and announced that she would leave the world of politics and return to the world of civic movements. With her withdrawal from politics, LMP lost the possible leading figure of the New Resistance initiative. Gábor Scheiring, a key new-left-oriented MP, also announced that he was thinking of stepping down. These announcements signaled the deep divisions and conflicts within the party. Any further escalation of conflicts was avoided by András Schiffer's decision to step down from the position of head of the LMP parliamentary group. His position was given to Benedek Jávor, a former green activist and a key LMP organizer.

As the internal conflict of LMP unfolded, the MSZP announced that it too would not join in the roundtable negotiations. With this announcement, this initiative by Solidarity lost its importance and faded away. Nonetheless, the internal divisions of LMP were not resolved. The intertwining of personal conflicts and opposing views concerning what it should do in 2014 increasingly intensified the internal conflicts. With whom would it cooperate? What was more important: a change in government, or maintaining distance from the MSZP? An especially thorny issue was the cooperation with Ferenc Gyurcsány, whose reckless spending policy, lies, and neoliberal reforms were anathema for many LMP activists. Indeed, it was like being in between two pagans, and one could not decide which one was worse.

In the summer of 2012, LMP got a new chance to break free from its strategic deadlock. Informal negotiations with Solidarity and Milla raised the possibility of creating a new electoral coalition between LMP and the two anti-Orbán and left-wing oriented movements, who also viewed the MSZP with critical eyes. A freshly established small new-left party, Fourth Republic! (4K!), also joined in the negotiations. A widely read position paper from a Milla activist outlined the New Pole (*Új Pólus*) initiative with the participation of these four organizations based on principles similar to LMP's founding principles. The paper called for radical democratic renewal and a controlled market economy. The paper was more critical of the Orbán government than of the MSZP. It suggested that despite all the misgivings about the MSZP, an electoral coalition against Fidesz could be formed, provided that the MSZP show restraint and accept less weight in the coalition than would be warranted sheerly on the basis of electoral support.⁵⁹

A new turn took place, however, in late summer 2012. Gordon Bajnai, who headed a technocratic government supported by the MSZP between 2009 and 2010, reached an agreement in secret negotiations with Solidar-

ity and Milla. Certain key activists within Solidarity and Milla, who had been searching for a potential candidate for prime minister to challenge Viktor Orbán, opted for Bajnai to lead a new electoral coalition. They hoped that his credentials and the technocratic circle around him would suffice to pose a real challenge to Orbán while ensuring a solid negotiation position with the MSZP in later coalition talks. On October 23, 2012, during a major mass rally organized by Milla, Bajnai announced that in association with Solidarity and Milla, he would launch Together 2014 (E2014), whose aim would be to challenge Orbán and to provide a new viable opposition option for voters who did not want to see Fidesz re-elected in 2014. LMP once again found itself alone, without a single strong (or even potential) ally.

E2014 formally requested that LMP join its alliance. The request again opened the debate over what LMP's strategic goals were and with whom it should ally in the 2014 elections. This time, the culprit of the internal debate was Gordon Bajnai. Bajnai and Gyurcsány had begun their careers together in the Hungarian Young Communist League during the pretransition regime. Bajnai, like Gyurcsány, left politics after the transition and became a wealthy businessman. He was a key minister in the Gyurcsány government. After Gyurcsány stepped down, he became prime minister and carried out a tough stabilization program following the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a coalition of business associations and economic experts. For many LMP activists, Bajnai was one of the typical representatives of the MSZP-related elite, a man who successfully converted political capital into real capital, then returned to politics espousing neoliberal-style policies.

E2014's request forced LMP to either decline or accept the offer. LMP was divided into two groups. One group, composed of mostly MPs oriented to the new left and activists based in Budapest, argued that the change of government was paramount and that LMP should join E2014 to achieve this. They also argued that together with E2014 they would be able to block the development toward a two-party system consisting of only Fidesz and the MSZP.⁶⁰ The other group, headed by András Schiffer and supported mostly by the conservative wing of LMP, argued that Bajnai represented the hated neoliberal past.⁶¹ Schiffer argued that LMP should continue to be in the center and at most enter into a limited technical coalition with the MSZP in order to reestablish the rule of law.⁶² Again, the policy differences between the two groups were reinforced by personal conflicts among key players. The distance grew increasingly unbridgeable. In November 2012, the LMP congress supported Schiffer's

position, reflecting the voting weight of the conservative-leaning rural organizations within LMP. The next day, Benedek Jávor stepped down from heading the LMP parliamentary group. In the months that followed, the gulf between the two groups opened more widely, which eventually led to the breakup of the party altogether. Those who left LMP wanted the coalition with E2014 in order to achieve a change of government in 2014. On February 18, 2013, those who left established the left-wing ecopolitical party Dialogue for Hungary (PM). PM joined E2014 to challenge Fidesz and to achieve a change of government in the 2014 elections under the candidacy of Gordon Bajnai. LMP remained again alone—this time possibly in the middle of nowhere.

Conclusion: Is There a Chance for New Politics?

The unexpected break out of credit crunch shook the Hungarian political system and opened up the political opportunity structure for new ideas and parties. Representatives of two hitherto unpopular ideological lines, the radical right and ecology, managed to build up measurable popular support and get into parliament, while the radicalized Fidesz won an overwhelming majority. Jobbik, the party of young radical right-wing rebels, achieved 47 seats, while LMP, the party of young radical new-left rebels, managed to field 16 candidates in the first elections under the black clouds of the existential crisis of the postsocialist capitalist system in 2010. Even more spectacular were the gains made by Fidesz, which managed to harvest more than two-thirds of the seats of the new parliament, combining traditional moderate-right conservatism with leftist-style welfare promises while at the same time also adopting rebellious antisystem, antiliberal and antioligarchic nationalistic messages.

Despite the fact that it was almost a miracle to gain such popularity within such a short time, LMP did expect more. Its members dreamed of winning a third of the votes and not being the smallest party in the new parliament.⁶³

Even more puzzling is the apparent failure of LMP to convert itself into a leading force in the opposition to Fidesz. One could not blame its members for not trying their best at doing serious politics. Following Fidesz's revolutionary turn, droves of voters turned away from Fidesz, yet neither Jobbik nor the MSZP was able to build up support among them. As a leading constructive oppositional force, LMP could have attracted more moderate educated voters. And their insistence not to ally with the

perceived culprits of the crisis, the MSZP and the SZDSZ liberals, could have attracted moderate right-wing voters who did not like Fidesz's revolutionary line but would not cross the line between right and left. A staunch defense of democratic principles and the rule of law could have attracted more voters, for these values are important. A defense of universal welfare and labor rights could have attracted more supporters among the needy, the poor, and all sorts of employees—those who turned their back on the MSZP but embraced the leftist worldview. In the demonstrations organized against the curtailment of rights, LMP leaders might have spoken to thousands instead of hundreds. Their messages and their mobilization attempts, however, failed to reach the disgruntled, those who wanted a different course for the country.

Not only did LMP members show themselves unable to drum up perceptible support, but they ended breaking up into two groups along the traditional left-right cleavage, acting as though they faced a desperate situation in which they were forced to choose one ally among two pagans. It seems too easy to lament, after knowing their tragic end, that youth is folly.⁶⁴ It is easy to list the apparent causes which led to the breakup of LMP. While direct democracy sometimes succeeds as an organizational form for a protest movement, it proves unsuitable for a political party with a complex portfolio and the need for minute-to-minute decisions. Chaotic internal order contributed to the buildup of a complex web of personal tensions. Granted, it is not at all unusual in the history of political parties to split along such political cleavages, and other green parties have also suffered from the same internal ideological divisions between left- and right-leaning activists.

We should also note that, in the Hungarian context, the rather intellectual-sounding and complex message of LMP had attracted only a relatively minor group of voters. Criticizing the unbridled globalized market economy provides a less striking message than criticizing the dominance of multinational companies and promising measures against them to better the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises. Ideology in the era of mass politics is about promising credible ways to deliver better living standards.⁶⁵ Compared to the easily understandable messages of Jobbik and Fidesz, from which voters could easily deduce—although perhaps erroneously—that they might be better off once the multinationals were squeezed out from local markets, the messages of LMP were not easy to decode; they were too synthetic and came across as excessively intellectual in tone and content. So it is no wonder that LMP mostly attracted the votes of urban educated middle-class voters but not large masses of vot-

ers. Maybe, the case of LMP again reinforces John Lukacs's observation that revolutionary movements promising rejuvenation in nationalistic guise are the ones that can really successfully attract the masses, as compared to non-nationalistic revolutionary movements that claim to represent universal values.⁶⁶

LMP also failed to develop and present charismatic leading figures who could translate its complex message into easy sound bites delivered in a folkish tone. LMP had the misfortune to be in competition with the charismatic Viktor Orbán. No single LMP activist could be identified as charismatic. Its leading spokesperson, András Schiffer, employed a moderate, professional-sounding communication style, sounding more like a legal expert than a politician. He explained things with great expertise and with great coherence, but his delivery lacked the vigor necessary to attract voter enthusiasm and devotion in the modern world.

In the highly divided Hungarian society, where, to use the metaphor of Ernst Nolte,⁶⁷ the big civil war of the 20th century between right and left did not end in 1945 but continued until 1989 and left many open wounds, LMP's middle-of-the-road position and its attempts to synthesize opposing ideas were seen by many as lukewarm, halfhearted politics.

LMP wanted a profound ethical renewal of Hungarian society, a new political culture free of power politics and corruption. Thus, it did not seek close cooperation with the institutions of the old left, which had their own historical baggage and demonstrated real-world practices that could be perceived as troubling when questioned from a remote ethical position. By its actions, LMP blocked its own ability to build the network it would have needed to emerge victorious from the resource-based attrition wars of modern mass politics.⁶⁸

LMP's greatest failure lay in its inability to create a lasting alliance with social movements of a similar profile, such as Milla and Solidarity, thereby protesting with some effect against the policies of the Orbán government. But one could also understand how adherents of these social movements thought that Gordon Bajnai could be a more capable challenger to Viktor Orbán than LMP—which relates back to the apparent lack of a charismatic leader in LMP. LMP remained alone, an island far from both the old left and the old right, and failed in its dream to help shape the modern history of Hungary.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of this sad story is that another party with revolutionary zeal worked its way into power and used the mandate it received to rearrange the country to suit its vision. Fidesz, making use of its extraordinary parliamentary win, took every possible measure to ensure

its unlimited power and to ensure its continued dominance, without dismantling the facade of the competitive-election-based democratic order. The new electoral law put LMP into an untenable situation. This came right at the moment when the key activists perceived that they had to choose between two pagans: whether to give up their original revolutionary vision of destroying the oligarchic neoliberal power of the old left, or to attempt a counterrevolution against Fidesz's revolutionary policies in defense of the rule of law and the liberal democratic order.

The choice between the two pagans came down to whether to ally with the old left or to stand alone and involuntarily contribute to the reelection of Fidesz. The extraordinary historical importance of this decision ripped the party in two—and turned former friends against each other. The unfolding history of LMP is a Greek fate and free-will-style tragedy. But this time not gods, but rather the godlike power of others caused the fall of the main character.

The real lesson of this story is the highly fragile nature of the Hungarian democratic system, which showed its lack of balanced power in a time of crisis. Once that traditional balance of power was disrupted and moderation was replaced by revolutionary zeal, the pendulum easily swung in one direction. And once a single party achieved its extraordinary majority on election day, modern parliamentary democracy proved defenseless to prevent the elected politicians from acting without restraint. In this sense, the major culprit in the tragedy of LMP is the disproportionate electoral law designed in 1989 to ensure a solid government in times of crisis. The disproportionate electoral law backfired as it elevated to undisputed power a political party that proceeded to employ the electoral machinery to establish itself as a long-term regime capable of dismantling nearly every prevailing constitutional check and balance.

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The Hungarian Student Network: A Counterculture in the Making*

Alexandra Zontea

The present chapter is based on a study conducted at the beginning of 2013 that focused on the occupation of the Faculty of Humanities (BTK) at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) building in February 2013, an event also known as the Blockade (*blokád*). The event was led by the Student Network (HaHa),¹ a newly formed student movement that succeeded in challenging established political forms and brought the Hungarian repertoire of collective action into previously uncharted waters.

This study builds on the argument that research in the field of social movements has generally concentrated on structural contradictions, disregarding the microinteraction level, including the cultural ground of social movements. Consequently, the present paper extends the general macro-level analysis of social movements, including a look at how the sociopolitical context fosters collective action, and explores the (sub)cultural ground of the student movement, particularly the microinteraction level of the group that founded HaHa. The chapter will address the case of HaHa as a student movement in the context of recent Hungarian “contentious politics”² by looking at the microinteraction level of the student community, such as changes in its membership, preexisting subcultural features,³ and movement identity, all of which underpin HaHa as the expression of a political counterculture in the making.

* The results of the research constituted my thesis for the degree of Master of Arts from the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University, Budapest. The thesis is entitled “Creating New Subjectivities: The Hungarian Student Network, a Counterculture in the Making.”

The primary focus of this chapter is on the productive dimension of the student movement, which became visible during the Blockade, and specifically how HaHa reimagined the social by creating new forms of organization and participation as well as new social subjectivities. Additionally, this chapter concentrates on the occupation event as the driving force for the emergence of new subjectivities, the creation of new public spaces, and the formation of a channel for the renewal of the generally accepted repertoire of contention.

“Szabadország, Szabadegyetem”: The Frame of Contention and Making the Blockade Possible

On the morning of February 11, 2013, a group of students from Eötvös Loránd University and Corvinus University of Budapest occupied the ELTE BTK building. They instituted a state of blockade under the slogans “Nothing about us without us”⁴ and “Free country, free university.”⁵ Specifically, the students intended to stop the educational process through boycotting classes and organizing sit-ins and sleepovers in the university. Above all, they aimed to reclaim the university by transforming it into a space of free debate and direct participation. Moreover, the Blockade was understood as an ultimate solution to the failure of representative democracy, specifically the corruption of the former Student Union (HÖÖK)⁶ and its lack of transparency in the processes of decision making. To a large extent, the occupation of ELTE BTK also emphasized the potentialities of self-organization in changing the structure of student representation through a decentralized configuration based on grassroots democracy.

The background events of 2011 and 2012, specifically the wave of reforms and decisions carried out in the Hungarian educational system, explains much of the frame of contentious politics. These reforms were carried out as economic-crisis-based measures and imposed severe budget cuts in state-funded university entities, mainly in the unprofitable specializations within the humanities and the social sciences. For this reason, December 2012 marked a month of massive student protests against these cuts and the implementation of the student contract system⁷ that was interpreted as threatening future career prospects. Indeed, the idea of occupation emerged as a counteraction to what might be called a process of knowledge commodification⁸ in neoliberal capitalism, and for this reason it led to a student movement that positioned itself against overregulation, the loss of university autonomy and the drastic government-imposed budget cuts.⁹

The state of blockade officially lasted until March 27, during which students participated in a series of actions and applied a diverse repertoire of contention,¹⁰ for instance combining street demonstrations (flash mobs, marches, street protests, public speeches, reenactments referring to the historical and political past) and direct action (occupying bridges, joining in action with other activist groups).¹¹ Apart from the organizational innovations, such as the working groups and daily forums, there were also tactical innovations, for example combining Occupy strategies with street protest and civil disobedience.



Photo 13.1. Announcing the Six-Point Agenda. (Courtesy of Dániel Ránki)

In addition, the street mobilizations and the occupation are part of a “logic of action”¹² attributed to HaHa, an alternative student initiative¹³ that emerged in May 2011 as a response to a crisis of student representation at Corvinus University of Budapest and the perceived malfunction of HÖÖK at the university level. Before its plan to mobilize students on February 11, HaHa became publicly visible in December 2012, when it brought together teachers and students in a forum and established the Six-Point Agenda¹⁴ as a main goal to be achieved in the subsequent months. Equally important is that HaHa gave an ultimatum to the government to fulfill the points by February 8, and threatened to start a national strike if the government refused. While the government did not consider their de-

mands and the strike did not happen, the students nevertheless occupied the ELTE BTK building and, later that day, organized a large street protest in which hundreds of people joined with them, entering the building and participating in three general forums while supporting the Blockade.

The following events of the occupation are strongly connected with what Tilly¹⁵ would define as going beyond the generally accepted repertoire of collective action, in particular the legitimate forms of action in a society at a certain point in time. So, going outside the accepted repertoire, such as marches or public speeches, would enable a movement, as Tarrow claimed,¹⁶ to call public attention and successfully challenge the established politics. After the first day of occupation, students appropriated the space of the largest classroom in the building and used it, in their terms, as the “square of debate,”¹⁷ namely as a space for daily forums, where students could freely participate in the decisions related to the occupation. They aimed to change the structure through grassroots democracy and de-hierarchization.

Although the idea of Occupy is not new for Hungarian universities (another attempt had already taken place in early 2012 at Corvinus University of Budapest), the ELTE BTK occupation was the first successful one in terms of enactment and repertoire of action. Consequently, the context of these events generates the following questions: Why was the ELTE BTK occupation carried out by HaHa at this point in time? And how did this action transcend the accepted repertoire of contention in Hungary by creating new subjectivities and new public spaces by consolidating HaHa’s newly formed countercultural identity?

Positioning and Entering the Field

The street demonstrations began in December 2012 after a general assembly with students, university professors and parents inside the main hall of Budapest Polytechnic. Although I did not know much about who was organizing the protest, the implied demands, or what HaHa was at that time, I attended the event in solidarity and positioned myself against the planned cuts.

The first time I encountered the members of HaHa was at the beginning of January, when I went to Frisco, a bar in Budapest, which happened to be their meeting place. After “occupying” a corner where “time stands still,”¹⁸ I observed a group of approximately seven people sitting at a nearby table and having a meeting. I found out about the ultimatum and

learned that they might organize a protest. After this encounter, I decided to do a project on HaHa for my ethnography course along with three colleagues from the Central European University. Thus, I conducted my fieldwork from January 20 to March 11, 2013, using participatory observation. I followed HaHa members during the ELTE BTK occupation, in the forum, in the streets during their marches and Occupy actions (such as bridges), and finally in their “offices” at Frisco and Sirály (another bar).



Photo 13.2. Forum in ELTE BTK, February 2012. (Courtesy of Alexandra Zontea)

January 19 marks my entry into the field; it was then that I attended my first HaHa meeting at Sirály. The idea of entering the field for the first time was exciting, as Sirály was a subversive place, partly illegal since its opening in 2006, a place with a history of conflicts with authorities, where manifold activities¹⁹ had been organized. Over the course of my fieldwork, as a non-Hungarian speaker, I participated in meetings and forums as an observer, while a fellow observer translated for me into English. Later, interviews and informal discussions were conducted in English. During my fieldwork, which ended in May 2013, I talked with new and former members of HaHa, as well as one member who left HaHa in order to join one of the opposition parties, Politics Can Be Different (LMP). I also had the chance to get in touch with other activists and discuss the student movement from a broader perspective, including its contribution to this field of political forces and its place in Hungarian civil society.

Writing about my position in the field, I mean to specify that I was a participant in most of the direct actions alternately from the inside and from the outside: being a spectator at some points (for instance, during forums) while at other times having a role in the *performance* of HaHa's action (marching in the street, blowing the whistle and shouting "Free country, free university"). Nevertheless, because of the language barrier and because I depended on other people's translations, I was an outsider. I experienced the position of being an insider, feeling part of the "we," feeling part of the flow of meanings, doing what Scheper-Hughes²⁰ calls "militant anthropology." Furthermore, it meant discovering the "really real" by being politically and morally engaged,²¹ specifically breaking with traditional anthropology, becoming engaged with the field, and adopting the position of the "activist anthropologist" in Maeckelbergh's conceptualization.²²

The Subcultural Background of the Student Network

"We are the first generation that grew up in democracy, and we don't want to be the last one."

(HaHa member)

There were other Occupy attempts led by the former members of HaHa in February and April–May 2012, but these actions, while they expressed a radical repertoire of action by HaHa's former members, were not as successful in practice as the Blockade of February 2013 proved to be. The main question is why: to what can the success of the occupiers in 2013 be attributed? The first tendency is to answer by relating to the context of generalized grievance, namely the proposed cuts and the changes to the Fundamental Law in Hungary. I contend that this is not sufficient in explaining the driving force of the occupation; that is why I will look at the micro-level of the founding group and track the changes in the membership of HaHa that, I argue, have channeled this action.

In the context of the proposed educational changes, the need for a student movement emerged, and, as one of my interviewees argues, that is why the period of 2011 is perceived as the "formative period." However, looking at the formative period of HaHa, it appears that this student initiative did not appear spontaneously but was grounded in an existing student community from Corvinus University of Budapest.

HaHa was formed in May 2011²³ by students from a renowned college, the College for Advanced Studies in Social Theory²⁴ (TEK) at Corvinus University of Budapest. As one former member mentions, 80 percent of HaHa's membership in the first phase was made up of close friends and colleagues living in the same dormitory, in other words a community setting based on a nonhierarchical structure and defined as a "participatory democratic self-governing organization." Additionally, this community had a defined structure as a formal organization, namely the TEK community. The call for a student initiative that was different from HÖÖK emerged against the background of 2011, along with the government plan discussed above, but also focused on a more specific problem localized at the university level, namely the announcement that Corvinus University of Budapest and TEK would be reorganized and torn apart.

HÖÖK was perceived to have failed to manage the situation: "I think this is an old feeling among the students, that HÖÖK doesn't represent us... They don't do anything in a participatory sense; they don't ask anyone concerned," said one former HaHa member; because of this, students from TEK formed HaHa, sketching a general agenda of action. At the beginning, they organized themselves against the closing of the university, further addressing the problems related to what they called the bigger picture," and protesting against the systemic cuts and against Prime Minister Orbán's regime. It appears that the first HaHa event actually took place in June 2011,²⁵ when approximately 100 students gathered in Fővám Square to protest against the shutting down of Corvinus. This event is important from an identity-formation perspective because it was the first time students wore T-shirts with the HaHa logo and appeared for the first time publicly under the HaHa banner.

Therefore, according to Koopmans's typology,²⁶ it can be argued that HaHa at first embodied the features of a subculture at TEK, namely that people shared similar values, friendships and practices that were localized because of living in the same dormitory, and then reproduced their practices in a closed "exclusive group with the college guys at its core," in the words of one HaHa member. In addition, it can be argued that HaHa was predisposed to become a successful driven force of collective action because, as Kriesi puts it, movement subcultures are reservoirs for collective action as their participants emerged from a presocialized group which found collective action congenial.²⁷



Photo 13.3. “Life chain” around Corvinus University of Budapest, February 28, 2012.
(Courtesy of Kelemen Kis)

According to my interviews with new and former members, after the first HaHa event in Fővám Square, February 2012 represented a month of “influential HaHa activities,” with important media coverage and attention that marks the moment when HaHa’s former members started recruiting new people. The “new guys”²⁸ entering HaHa were actually from another university and another campus, namely from the Student Network at the Faculty of Social Sciences at ELTE (LÉK).²⁹ What appealed in the new membership was that the new people were also presocialized in another community, with their own shared values and practices and a student organization cell, prior to the foundation of HaHa. The particularity of the LÉK group was, as one of the former members of HaHa defined it, the practice of “everyday activism,” taking part in ordinary life, such as planting trees, gardening on the campus, and participating in various community activities on a small scale. In comparison with the TEK group, which was more oriented toward debates and conversations, usually held at Frisco,³⁰ LÉK was seen to be more connected to real students by engaging directly in the student organization and through these campus activities. Additionally, the different orientation of the new members came to be perceived as a source of tension within HaHa.³¹

Initially, the discussions in HaHa seemed to be dominated by the founders, the old members who in fact were “really exclusive, expecting everybody to know [their] language,” embracing and reproducing the existing

leftist ideology of the group. Apart from this, there were also requirements in terms of punctuality, responsibility, engagement, and efficiency, as core shared values for the proper functioning of the organization. Moreover, this led to palpable tensions inside New HaHa, which became translated as a perceived lack of freedom in participation³² in the decisions of HaHa. As one of the former members claims, these tensions were related to group dynamics as in a student classroom, where you have “cliques,” such as the cool guys or the popular ones. Another member imagines this as a question of seeing the others as “good soldiers for the cause, comrades,” or just bohemian nice guys but not very responsible.



Photo 13.4. Forum in ELTE BTK, February 2012. (Courtesy of Alexandra Zontea)

During the interviews, a clear “us”/“them” discourse emerged when I asked about HaHa events and membership before December 2012. It is interesting to see how this community dichotomy between TEK and LÉK visibly structures the members’ discourse in terms of old and new “generation”³³ or “wave” (also referred to in this text as “Old HaHa” and “New HaHa,” respectively). In this text, I will understand the “old generation” to mean the TEK group, the former members, an exclusive group of students who founded HaHa, but at the end of the academic year of 2012, and, be-

cause of graduation, tended to “pass” HaHa on to the new guys.³⁴ The “new generation” refers to the newly recruited members, coming from LÉK, who became the real “new wave” in December 2012 by forming the Strike group and “Occupy HaHa,” as one of the members called it. In conceptualizing “generation,” a difference of age can be spotted between the two groups, but I assert that the ideological orientation and the subcultural features of each group are more relevant in understanding the changes in the membership.

In giving a possible explanation for the “whys” of the Blockade or the source of the “new collective action frame”³⁵ promoted by the movement, I argue that in the general political context, the driving force of the occupation is a generational shift in HaHa, due to a change in membership. Moreover, this shift from the old to the new wave also entails a transition from a pure theoretical position of HaHa to a more radical logic of practical action. This also happens because some of the new members managed to connect their profession or education with HaHa activities. For instance, during the occupation, when the working groups were constituted, according to one of my interviewees, many media studies students took part in the communication and media working group, practicing what they had learned and improving the efficiency of HaHa in various areas.

During the summer of 2012, a decline in participation was observed, against the background of unleashed tensions and because most of the former members had graduated.³⁶ As one of the former members observes, “[former HaHa members] were rather thinking about media coverage; they were more like taking part in everyday life” and at the end of the summer, everything collapsed because “the [new guys] were really fed up with HaHa. For them HaHa meant this exclusive, really radical leftist thing” or “Bolshevik community that you have to fight against.” Hence, what I can grasp from this is that the new members entered HaHa with their own personal identities and previous social identities,³⁷ and then had to adjust to the collective identity of HaHa, which involved a certain set of values and practices imposed by the older generation.

By December 2012, the new generation in HaHa, when it formed Strike, had assumed control of HaHa.³⁸ This was the moment when the new generation came to “Occupy HaHa,” and detached the organization from the leftist labels that the former members had promoted.

They decided not to choose an organizational name, as they didn’t want a new organization, just one name that would tie everything together to strike: in the words of one New HaHa member, “that we organize the strike, and that’s all; we don’t have a name; we don’t have anything. We are just students, which is very similar to the Croatian way.”³⁹



Photo 13.5. HaHa protest, December 12, 2012. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

Consequently, the detachment from HaHa was not done with the purpose of forming a new organization, but rather introduced a new name that “would not separate students from us [new members],” as those in new wave seemed to imagine. Many members from the new generation saw in the former HaHa a “closed group of elite students,” “liberal inner-city intellectuals,” a “radical group of people, revolutionary-type, from several different generations”; they were portrayed as “intelligentsia,” though they “were much more hipsterish; they had ideas but action not so much.”

From both groups, interviewees claim that there were tensions generated not only by HaHa’s name, which already had some meaning attached to it, namely a leftist orientation, but also because of “personal differences” and “personalities.” This suggests a sort of discrepancy between individual identities and the sense of “we,” the sense of being part of a group that shapes social identities related to membership and undergirds the collective identity.

From the interviews, the idea of the new generation avoiding the leftist “etiquette” emerges and clearly reflects the political landscape in Hungary. As one member explained, the ideological landscape is highly politicized between right and left; “if you say leftist you already align; you put yourself in the box.” Further, the fear of being called a leftist actually

serves to avoid this binary system, which tends to limit actions by providing only two alternatives of positioning and action to every challenge.

The message of the movement, which emerges from my interview analysis, is that even if this polarization of the ideological landscape exists, HaHa members tend to distinguish between two ways of doing and participating in politics: party politics and everyday politics. Detaching oneself from “party politics,” goes their logic, does not mean not having a position in “everyday politics.” For this reason, the first type of politics represents something that they do not believe in because it resides in the manner in which they imagine a movement: “If you want to build a movement, you should stay away from party politics,” meaning political affiliations.

“The political culture is not so set for the scene, but even if the right party gets into power, they will get corrupted very soon, and they will be forced by the logic of representative democracy; they will start being demagogic and start thinking differently until they want to be reelected. And they want to be reelected because this is how they work. And we think that giving up being critical to the system would take away our message because our message is: many more people should get involved in politics, involved in democracy; we want to create participatory systems even at the university level or at smaller levels... it could take our message away if we sign with a party, or if we share the message of one party,” said one HaHa member.

The second type of politics is related to offering a critique of the system, as one of the members expressed it: “It’s not about getting away from party politics or getting into party politics, it’s more like being critical of the system.” And this meets the perceived need of participation in democracy, encouraging students to organize themselves. Additionally, implementing participatory democracy, the improvement of the education system becomes HaHa’s mission because, as one of the members argues, “education defines everything, is the key, the core.” What is latent and graspable only through the analysis of interviews is HaHa’s view on Hungarian politics, which addresses the systemic issue in which most other problems reside: “Orbán is just the product of the system, not the key element, and it doesn’t really matter if he or another similar person gets into power... real change can come if society changes, changing the elite.” For this purpose, members stress education reform and make this subject the main point of their action agenda. Their vision of social change resides in changing from below, meaning solving the way in which the system functions and how this system produces its structures.



Photo 13.6. Still life during the occupation, ELTE BTK. (Courtesy of Alexandra Zontea)

According to my respondents, the idea of occupation crystallized along with the formation of Strike, after watching a documentary on the Croatian Blockade, in the autumn of 2012. From my talks with new and former members, it seems that the main reason to undertake the Blockade was that this action, as one member argues, “would have had a spillover effect which would serve as the basis of the movement.” In other words, it seems that the occupation would have served as a crucial contribution to the movement’s identity, by unifying HaHa’s collective identity, creating a common subjectivity, such as the “occupier,” and impelling the organization from a state of latency to public visibility. This relates to Melucci’s⁴⁰ two-pole model of latency and visibility, which, when applied to the present case, underlines a transition from HaHa as the expression of a subculture to its becoming a counterculture. Furthermore, this means that alternating between latency and visibility allows HaHa not only to reproduce its values, codes, and practices within the organization’s internal relationships, but also to bring them into the public space, to make them visible under an agenda of claims that is alternative to and opposed to dominant social codes.⁴¹ As Melucci argues, these two dimensions greatly help form new solidarities and enhance mobilization, but at the same time

attract new participants and militants.⁴² As one of the members put it, “the occupation is really happening and is the magnet which brings people [in].”

One might assert that the occupation comes as an important contribution, not only for creating this new subjectivity of “occupier” but also because it reveals the productive dimension of the student movement. This is further understood through the creation of a grassroots structure of democratic discussion and participation: the forum—the appropriation of space—which embodies a contradiction, being public and private at the same time. But it also points at a new repertoire of contention through organizational innovations (such as the working groups), tactical innovations (such as nonviolent action and civil disobedience), and demanding democratization through forms of participatory democracy, which represents a new view on how to do politics through depoliticization and how to re-imagine social and civil society.

Manifested in the appropriation of one of ELTE BTK’s biggest classrooms, the Hungarian Blockade was defined mainly through activities such as the forum, the teach-ins, and the sleepovers, but also through the presence of the media and opposition to different social bodies, such as government representatives, Ultras Liberi (right-wing soccer fans), HÖÖK representatives, university officials, and other students.⁴³ The first stage of the occupation is defined by this appropriation of space, familiarization with it, and establishing the routines, such as the daily forum and the use of the hand language, which serves as the basis for a collective identity of the occupiers. Familiarization with the space presupposes merging a public space for open debate with a private space for eating, drinking, reading, sleeping, etc.

In this regard, the occupied room appeared to embody a contradiction; it became a twofold space, public and private at the same time. I will offer a passage from my ethnography that emphasizes the transformation and redefinition of the occupied room, and how this contradiction emerges:

As we entered the building, heading toward the plenary room, we crossed through the hall, where usually a messy table with food and drinks sat near the entrance. Somebody was making a toast sandwich (a toaster was sitting on a chair toasting the bread), and the hall smelled of all kinds of foods. I felt like I was about to enter someone’s living room: people were pouring drinks, spreading slices of bread; it created a really homey, inviting atmosphere. From the entrance, the first thing that I observed was the general mess: sleeping bags everywhere, HaHa banners rolled up and left in one of the corners of the room (clearly, they had a problem of identity, in the sense of who is actually occupying the university—HaHa or ordinary students?—or maybe they kept

them rolled because of the group that was supposed to attend the forum later⁴⁴), clothes, papers, empty and half-full bottles on the floor and on the front desk, where the moderators usually stood.

On the margin of the sink near the blackboard was some liquid soap for washing dishes, and some freshly rinsed glasses; there was also a radiator (brought from home) for people who were spending the night in the plenary room. I could also see that on the blackboard, there with the schedule of the day's forum, were also some lyrics from Pink Floyd, adapted to the 6-point situation:

We need higher education
We don't need no thought control.

Also, on the blackboard they had drawn a plate as those from the city with "Vita vér 6-8" (Debate Square, District VIII—this is clearly a reference to the district with a bad reputation). So, they had transformed the space of the auditorium into a personalized space of debate, friendly and cozy to live in. They had improvised a little library under the front desk. What I found amusing is that during the plenary a girl came into the room, and while people were debating and voting she started washing dishes, as though she was in her own kitchen, washing dishes in the sink where professors usually wash the chalk off their hands.

All this indicates, apart from an appropriation and a familiarization with the space, the transformation of space into a detained one that has been taken under control. This place actually became more than an ordinary room in the university, where people come and go, where professors lecture and then leave. It became *their* place ("theirs," the "Debate Square" but also where people live, eat, wash dishes, sleep, read books from their own library, etc.), which was kept under control, was "blocked." Additionally, this room was governed by another dimension of time than the rest of the rooms in the building, because after 8:00 the university closes, and they are locked inside: the public becomes closed, the private takes over. Also, I believe that having this room under control ("locking themselves in there" or being locked inside at night, since the faculty officially closes after 8:00) empowered them to admit that they were actually occupying and that the Blockade was not only symbolic but took place by them having this room under control and sleeping in there. The room of the general assembly defined them as occupiers; it was the room where they were forging a new type of democracy (a participatory one). And at the same time, this room comprised a whole repertoire of symbols for exclusiveness (such as the personal objects of the occupiers, who were in fact HaHa members, the making of "theirs" and of the private) and for inclusiveness (the banners with the six points, Hungarian flags, the routine of the assembly, namely, what made the place open for the public).



Photo 13.7. HaHa demonstrates against the fourth amendment to the Fundamental Law.
(Courtesy of Dániel Ránki)

Implementing the forum model as a practice of democratic discussion and participation seems to have transformed the room into what Melucci⁴⁵ describes: “A new political space is designed beyond the traditional distinction between state and civil society: an intermediate public space, whose function is not to institutionalize the movements nor to transform them into parties, but to make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making, while the movements maintain their autonomy.”

While witnessing a process of collective identity consolidation though which members struggled to attain consistency between individual identity and the movement identity, the space of the occupied room seemed a stage, the melting point where the external and internal relationships of HaHa enlarged or diminished identity dynamics.⁴⁶ A decisive moment in terms of creating subjectivities and consolidating or extending HaHa’s collective identity occurred during the occupation, two days after the takeover of ELTE BTK, when HaHa voted in the forum to attribute this Blockade to the “occupiers” and not to HaHa. That is why all the symbols, such as banners, slogans, and logos related to HaHa were removed from the occupied amphitheater. A former member observed that the “[new guys] just felt it’s exclusive again...so they didn’t want to build barriers

with all the HaHa bullshit,” as this would keep away many students who might be reluctant to identify with the movement. Thus, we can witness different stages in shifting identities⁴⁷ that depend on how HaHa imagined the movement to be perceived externally; this last shift, from HaHa to occupiers, was also a sign of their struggle for inclusiveness.

Changing the view of the occupation by shifting from a HaHa occupation to an action of the occupiers was also a strategy against the attacks from the media, especially the right-wing media, because “you cannot be criticized for doing a fresh thing,” as one HaHa member asserted. It appears that they were pushed in different directions and felt the need to distance themselves from these forces, such as media attacks, because for them the message they transmitted, and how it was received by newspaper readers, was seen as vitally important. On the other hand, creating this new subjectivity of occupier involved a more open attitude toward new participants: as one former HaHa member put it, “Openness is important when building a movement. Sometimes you should put aside your ideologies and concentrate on the practical side.” Thus it was perceived that the highest value was given to the message, which was about educational reform and direct participation. Ideology, in contrast, was perceived as a shallow factor in the polarized political context.

In terms of the occupied room, it seems that apart from constituting the basis for the occupier subjectivity, it also provided the space to experiment with new democratic forms. Consequently, it seems that the purpose of the movement was not only to address the emergence of a new type of subjectivity or collective identity, but as Cohen would put it, also the democratic potential in it, such as “the creation of new public spaces, of additional democratic forms, and the restructuring or revitalization of old ones, as it happens in the context of the occupation.”⁴⁸ It appears that the forum represented a new public space, one in which occupiers experimented with subjectivities, shifting identities and building a new space in relation to external bodies and opposing actors. In other words, it seems that the occupied space encompassed two complementary dimensions: being public, through the practice of the forum, the open debates and the fluidity of spectators, actors, moderators; and being private, through the occupiers’ personal objects that define it as being “theirs,” such as sleeping bags, dishes, books, towels, and various objects.

Although it encapsulated this new identity of occupier, along with the reproduction of a new political participation space, the room exhibited practices, values, codes, and rules that defined HaHa. Further, it means that what was an underground subcultural collective identity, produced by

interaction within the group, was made public through media presence and other bodies present in this room. Moreover, this collective identity also attained visibility through street demonstrations and through the renewal of the repertoire of contention, which I will deal with below.

Breaking the Limits: The Renewal of the Repertoire of Contention

I understand HaHa as the expression of a political counterculture⁴⁹ because it manifests as a fusion between underground subculture (an alternative community to the official HÖÖK, with its own practices, rules, and lifestyle), leftist politics (which is not clearly assumed, but embedded in the practices) and the new created subjectivity of the occupier.

The countercultural characteristic is built on HaHa's opposing external relationships with the antagonistic forces, for instance, different actors and institutions including HÖÖK representatives, government officials, media, and the *Ultrasi Liberi*. Building a collective identity against these opponents also entails bringing into the mainstream the subcultural features of the movement and proposing new forms of organization and participation. Furthermore, HaHa appears to be conceptualized by its members in terms of a very fluid movement, based on participation and horizontality, incorporating new forms of democracy and organizational structures.

In terms of novelty, when we look at how members (mainly the new generation) envision participation and membership in HaHa, the movement is conceptualized in terms of being part of something "new" and "fresh," although some members were part of other civic organizations before. At the same time, this perception comes mostly from members who were not from Budapest but from other cities near the capital, and who expressed the "novelty feeling" that they became part of a community that knew how to debate and achieve something through this fluidity of ideas. In this regard, members came to value the culture of participatory democracy and understand its practice through "everyday politics." The model that they proposed along with the idea of occupation indicates not only an emerging countercultural dimension but also the global aspect of the movement.

They named the occupation the Blockade, which is a term borrowed from the Croatian Student Occupation in 2009, and which was previously implemented by Serbian students in 2006. Therefore, the analysis of the occupation reveals a pattern of occupation that, apart from being applied regionally (the Balkans, Central Europe), is modeled on the example of

los indignados and Occupy Wall Street, incorporating main elements such as the general assembly process, sparkly fingers (the hand language), consensus-based decisions, organization into working groups, and the embrace of prefigurative politics.⁵⁰



Photo 13.8. HaHa demonstration, March 2013. (Courtesy of Dániel Ránki)

I underline the global character of the movement and how it was adjusted to the local context in expressing the basis of HaHa as a counterculture. From interviews and discussions with the members, it appears that one of the most appreciated principles is *horizontality*, understood both as a practice and as a value.⁵¹ This is made possible through the process of dehierarchization, meaning the construction of collective processes that disperse power. This is where the idea of fluidity appears during the interviews as a governing principle in participation. This principle of fluid participation is understood in relation to being leaderless: the members reject the idea of elitism (meaning people who have power over the group) and affirm that they do not have leaders but rather people who devote more of their time to the movement. Moreover, this can be also understood through different degrees of participation: leadership is not openly expressed, but there are people more involved or more active than others. At the same time, if we look at their vision of democracy,⁵² it relates to an assembly-based model: the decision-making process takes place in a daily

forum in the faculty auditorium that includes the members of the movement and other students or partisans—whoever wants to participate. Although decisions are taken by the majority through voting and using the hand language, this decision-making process occurs under the supervision of a moderator who orients the direction of the debates according to the daily agenda.

Clearly, the culture of participatory democracy, the forum, the practice and value of horizontality, and the pattern of Occupy suggest that HaHa incorporates a global dimension by sharing the values and practices of the recent global movements. With this in mind, the particularity of the student demonstrations resides in how these elements translated into local practices, such as the renewal of the repertoire of action, the introduction of new strategies and new forms of protest, and alternating the engagement in occupation with street protesting.

This examination of HaHa's recent activism demonstrates that its strategies and tactics—direct action by occupying ELTE BTK and different public spaces (e.g., Liberty Bridge); the use of flash mobs and street demonstrations (e.g., marches, public speeches); and the introduction of the forum in the space of the university—are, apart from forging new forms of democracy, also an expression of a counterculture in the making. These strategies may be seen not only as signs of crisis and tension in the social order, but much more as attempts to experiment and offer participatory alternatives to a malfunctioning representative democracy and the failures of the government.

Apart from the participatory democracy scheme and the practice of horizontality, which have no precedents in Hungarian political culture, it is also important to mention the stress on nonviolent confrontations, such as civil disobedience and direct action.⁵³ Moreover, during these street actions, an element of novelty involved using historical references and reenacting important political moments. During December 2012, the protesters, as one member argues, “stole” Humán Platform's demonstration and gave it a symbolic meaning related to the 1956 revolution. They headed to Hungarian Radio (MR) and demanded that the station broadcast their claims like the protesters from 1956. As one of the members confirms, “the radio demonstration absolutely had a symbolic meaning of 1956, as the revolutionaries occupied the radio and announced that they were free.” At the same time, however, it constituted an attack on the government because, as the same member affirms, the radio is ruled by the government. Another reference appeared on the day of the occupation, when during the street demonstration that evening protesters marched to

the National Museum and collectively began to recite on its stairs a famous poem written by Sándor Petőfi, “*Nemzeti dal*,” as a reenactment of the events of the 1848 revolution.

Discussing these reenactments with HaHa members, it appears that they serve to create a common ground for people to identify with while also being a source of mobilization, apart from ideologies and political preferences, with the purpose of attracting sympathizers:

“We wanted to make people with national feelings more empathic to us ... let them see that we were peaceful, that this is not a riot, we are not a horde, but we are intelligent young people who want to make this country better,” said one HaHa member who initiated the recitation.



Photo 13.9. Improvised press conference before occupation of Fidesz headquarters, March 7, 2013. (Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

Using these political and historical references, it becomes possible to position the student movement in its national and local context. Another reference was more accidental and occurred on March 7 in an action, not organized by HaHa itself, in which HaHa activists and others from various civic organizations climbed the fences of Fidesz headquarters and occupied its courtyard for a day. While sitting in the courtyard, HaHa activists opened one of the dustbins and found Fidesz programs and leaflets from 1989 and 1990 and started to read loudly what Fidesz had to say about

education, freedom of speech, and democracy back then—something very similar to what HaHa activists want today and something extremely different from what Fidesz currently says and does. The parallel with the young Fidesz back in 1989 and the HaHa movement today is even stronger considering that when that (then liberal) party was founded, only people under 35 were granted membership: “Don’t trust anyone over 30.” Supporting this parallel, one of the former members told me that when Strike took over HaHa, one of the newly suggested rules was that only students could be part of HaHa, which would have involved the exclusion of the old generation considering that many former members were graduates at that time.⁵⁴

Apart from historical and political references, another innovation in the repertoire of contention mentioned above was used more as a strategy in street mobilization, what some of the members refer to as “stealing demonstrations” or “occupy the demonstration,” as one HaHa member exclaimed. For instance, in the case of the Humán Platform demonstration, HaHa apparently took over and led people to the National Radio. Another time, on December 19 on Margaret Bridge, when HaHa demonstrators met with high school students leading a parallel march, they again took over the demonstration by uniting the forces and organizing a spontaneous forum on the bridge. As one member explains, “there was always the formal demonstration that was announced to the police and was absolutely legal, and after that it was a spontaneous demonstration” resulting from merging two groups of protestors—or, as happened on the day of the occupation, the afternoon protest had a certain itinerary announced to the police but was then brought inside the university.

HaHa’s repertoire of contention comprises three dimensions—nonviolent action (civil disobedience, direct action), the merging of groups of protestors (“stealing the demonstration”), and historical reenactments—as strategies of mobilizing people and undoubtedly of redefining the conflictive relationship with the present government’s representatives and maintaining the expressivity of the movement. Certainly this is a “movement remarkably sophisticated at self-representation,”⁵⁵ and this *performativity* obviously reinforces the expression of the identity of the movement. This process builds on the conflictive interaction with the Hungarian political environment, which is essential to the reproduction of this identity: “Things seem to go slower if there is nothing to go against; there is no clear target,” said one HaHa member.



Photo 13.10. The biggest HaHa rally at night, March 11, 2013.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to orient the analysis of social movements to what many studies have previously ignored—namely the microinteractions and the cultural background of the movement itself. More broadly, I offer an insight on how people who are engaged in this type of activism create a new social ontology and new subjectivities as part of daily performativity.

Further studies might further address the trajectories of participation⁵⁶ in this student movement and also how individual factors such as ideology, resources, social networks, and social biography influence initial engagement in the movement. For instance, it would be inspiring to trace the differences in the trajectories of participation of members who come from the countryside in comparison to those from Budapest.

To sum up: creating new subjectivities, creating new spaces, changing the repertoire of action, and proposing new forms of organization and participation indicate that HaHa is the expression of a countercultural movement in the making, opposing the established forms of representative democracy, and reimagining the social through the productive dimension of the movement.

Notes and references

- 1 In Hungarian, Hallgatói Hálózat.
- 2 Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007).
- 3 Ruud Koopmans, *Democracy from Below: New Social Movements and the Political System in West Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 32–33. By subculture I mean what Koopmans understands by the interaction between movement participants, through the sharing and reproducing of practices, values, and beliefs within the group.
- 4 In Hungarian, “Semmit rólunk, nélkülünk.”
- 5 In Hungarian, “Szabad ország, szabad egyetem.”
- 6 In Hungarian, Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája.
- 7 “Awake From Your Slumber! Class Analysis of the Recent Student Protests in Hungary,” *Red News*, January 28, 2013, <http://www.rednews.hu/hirek-a-frontrol/default/awake-from-your-slumber-class-analysis-of-the-recent-student-protests-in-hungary.html> (accessed October 9, 2013). Those admitted to a government-funded degree program would have to sign a contract stipulating that they would not leave the country after graduation, or else the full tuition fee would have to be reimbursed to the government.
- 8 Claudia Bernardi and Andrea Ghelfi, “We Won’t Pay for Your Crisis, We Will Create Institutions of the Common,” *EduFactory Web Journal*, Zero Issue (2010): 108, <http://www.edu-factory.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/edufactory-journal-0.pdf> (accessed June 4, 2013). This refers to knowledge becoming the most important source of contemporary capitalistic value; specifically, the university is transformed into a productive central site for capitalist value.
- 9 Károly Füzesi, “Higher Education Under Threat in Hungary,” *openDemocracy*, February 11, 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/k%C3%A1rly-f%C3%BCzessi/higher-education-under-threat-in-hungary> (accessed October 9, 2013). This is an online post on the general background of the protests in December 2012.
- 10 Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 4. By repertoire of contention I understand “the whole set of means for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups.”
- 11 *Such as the occupation of Fidesz headquarters on March 7, 2013, along with activists from “The city is for all” (A Város Mindenkié) and other civic organizations; they joined in the action under the banner “Constitution is not a game” (Az alkotmány nem játék).*
- 12 Richard J. F. Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements,” *Cultural Studies* 8, no. 5 (2004): 716–48.
- 13 I call it “alternative” because, unlike HÖÖK, HaHa is not an organization per se with a legal status, but a student movement, based on horizontal structures and following an associational model characterized by diversity and fluidity in membership. Its members are students from both ELTE and Corvinus.
- 14 “We demand the complete reform of public and higher education; the number of government-funded seats should be reinstated to the 2011 level; stop budget cuts and compensate previous cuts; abolish the student contracts; do not limit the autonomy of universities; give a chance to disadvantaged students to enter higher education.”
- 15 Tilly, 1986.

- 16 Sidney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements and Cycles of Protest* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- 17 In Hungarian, *Vita tér*.
- 18 There was a movie poster with the Hungarian movie *Time Stands Still* (Megáll az idő, 1982).
- 19 Sirály has special significance for the activist scene in Budapest as Hungary's green party, LMP, and the civic organization Milla were both founded here, and their members planned many of their street demonstrations in this place. In addition, it was here that HaHa organized Open University week before the occupation and a lot of parties took place. The place is now officially closed.
- 20 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 3 (1995): 409.
- 21 This is what Scheper-Hughes refers to as *companheira* (participant) anthropology.
- 22 Marianne Maeckelbergh, *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy* (New York: Pluto Press, 2009), 29.
- 23 According to the interviewees, HaHa had approximately 20 members in the initial stage.
- 24 This type of college, along with others such as Rajk László College for Advanced Studies, which I will mention further, is a type of institution that offers both education and accommodations. Therefore, this involves a closed community group of people, studying the same specialization and living in the same dormitory.
- 25 It was supposed to be an event that would have brought together all the students from Corvinus University, with presupposed sleepovers in the university, but the rector banned the event and they were forced to do it outside, in front of Corvinus, in the public square.
- 26 Koopmans, 1995.
- 27 Hanspeter Kriesi, "Local Mobilization Processes in the Dutch Peace Movement," in *From Structure to Action: Social Movement Participation Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press, 1988), 41–82.
- 28 I am using this term here as part of the subcultural language, as used by my interviewees; it translates as the new members.
- 29 LÉK was not a homogenous community of students as was TEK.
- 30 This bar functioned as HaHa's "office," an important meeting point, and a place run voluntarily by former students.
- 31 In the words of one former HaHa member, "It was a vicious circle because we weren't sharing responsibilities... We were more thinking about media coverage; they were more like taking part in everyday life."
- 32 In the words of one former HaHa member, "It was a high tension at that time, and we were really frustrated that they were not taking part; they were really frustrated that we wouldn't let them take part."
- 33 A couple of my respondents also mention a "middle generation" that tried to penetrate the network during this transition from Strike to New HaHa in December 2012.
- 34 As one of the former members affirmed, they exclaimed to the new members, "You are HaHa now!"
- 35 I understand here the change in the repertoire of contention and at the same time the new forms of organizations and action brought on by HaHa during the occupation.

- 36 Participation in HaHa was mainly perceived as being connected to the student life; as one former member argues, "It's not like an organization where you can do that whenever you want."
- 37 Bert Klandermans and Marga de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest," in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, ed. Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert R. White (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 68–90. I will refer to social identity as the feeling of being part of a group, translated as membership and identification with the group, according to this membership.
- 38 I need to make clear the fact that Strike has to be envisioned as a transition phase between Old HaHa and New HaHa, with no public visibility as an organization. Still, according to my interviewees, it actually came up with the idea of the occupation, organized the general assemblies on December 5 and 10, and conceived of the Six-Point Agenda. Nevertheless, the occupation was done under the banner and the symbols of (new) HaHa. "Taking over" HaHa refers to this transition.
- 39 The Croatian way refers to the screening of a Croatian documentary entitled *The Blockade*, which depicts the Croatian student movement of 2009, which took the form of a strike inside the university, with students taking over the building and instituting the state of blockade.
- 40 Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Social Movements," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 789–816 (accessed on JSTOR on February 22, 2013).
- 41 Such as opposing the model of representative democracy and offering as alternative forms of governing participatory and direct democracy.
- 42 The occupation greatly increased the number of members in HaHa. If at the beginning there were around 20 members, then in December 2012 there were between 30 and 40 people; after February 2013, the Facebook group showed an official number of 160 members. Thus, this action channeled recruitment and potentiated participation.
- 43 I refer here to students who opposed HaHa. Specifically I refer to an incident in which I took part on day 10 of the occupation, February 20. Approximately 50 students from ELTE came into the forum room, refused to sit down and use the hand language, and started clapping as a sign of defiance. They argued that they could not accept "[HaHa] rules," as long as HaHa did not comply with "[their] rules/demands" (such as stopping the occupation and this boycott of the educational process). It was interesting to observe in these moments the division underlined by the language used, such as "us"/"them," "your rules"/"our rules," and to see HaHa being portrayed by the group as an outlaw group that did not comply with the rules of the university.
- 44 Referring here to the Humanities Student Union representatives.
- 45 Melucci, 1985: 815.
- 46 Sheldon Stryker, "Identity Competition: Key to Differential Social Movement Participation?," in Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert R. White, *Self, Identity, Movements*, 21–41.
- 47 Such as Old HaHa, Strike, New HaHa, Occupiers, and HaHa.
- 48 Jean L. Cohen, "Rethinking Social Movements," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 28 (1983): 110.
- 49 April Carter, *Direct Action and Liberal Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1973).
- 50 Marianne Maeckelbergh, "Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as a Strategic Practice in the Alterglobalization Movement," *Social Movement Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 1–10, http://www.academia.edu/602251/Doing_is_Believing_Prefiguration_as_Strategic_Pra

- ctice_in_the_Alterglobalization_Movement_Social_Movement_Studies_10_1_1-20 (accessed October 9, 2013).
- 51 Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Marianne Maeckelbergh, "Horizontal Democracy Now: From Alterglobalization to Occupation," *Interface* 4, no. 1 (2012): 207–34, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Interface-4-1-Maeckelbergh.pdf> (accessed October 9, 2013).
 - 52 Donatella della Porta, *Democracy in Social Movements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
 - 53 As it happened, the street march on February 18 ended with the occupation of Petőfi Bridge and then of Liberty Bridge, even though the police opposed this action and tried to stop the march. It is important to mention that usually the repertoire of action includes a combination of actions such as public speeches, followed by marches and direct action such as occupation.
 - 54 This rule was not enacted in the end.
 - 55 David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13 (2002): 61–73, <http://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists> (accessed June 4, 2013).
 - 56 Catherine Corrigan-Brown, *Patterns of Protest: Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Increasingly Radical Interventions: The New Wave of Political Art in Hungary

Gergely Nagy

“C’est ici que commence une révolution”

Sophie Dodelin’s sign in Hungarian artist Tamás Kaszás’s studio, Budapest

“We will pay him to not paint”

Pál Gerber’s sign in art historian Zsolt Petrányi’s office, Hungarian National Gallery

In this essay, visual arts will enjoy the most attention partly because, in my view, that is the area where the turn toward a political and activist approach has been the most pronounced. Also, I focused on visual art because contemporary domestic criticism has not described this shift in detail. To prepare this piece, I conducted interviews in the spring and summer of 2012 with the following individuals: Zsolt Petrányi, art historian and curator, the principal director of Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle) between 2005 and 2011, currently on staff at the Hungarian National Gallery; Csaba Nemes, visual artist and professor, an active participant and close observer of developments in political art; József Havasréti, aesthetician, department head at the University of Pécs; and finally the young staff members at Tranzit such as Emese Süvecz and Zsuzsa László, whose work involves continually reflecting on the freshest processes in domestic art and fostering its growth. I wish to say thank you to them all. The text was first finished in July 2012, but developments in the political art scene, including scandalous ones, intensified. This led me to complement the manuscript in January 2013, but the text remains unfinished because the situation is in constant flux.

Vienna, June 2012. At the exhibition entitled *Hungarica* at Knoll Galerie, dealing with Eastern European art and having a showroom in both the Austrian and the Hungarian capitals, Tibor Horváth presents a coffin-sized box, a kind of a giant case. It bears the title *The Prime Minister of Hungary*. On this simple claret- or flesh-colored case, the outcome of mixing red, white, and green, there is a spongy opening. Reaching into this opening, one can feel a lifelike figure, allegedly the body of the prime minister, from tip to toe: a haunting moment. We are reminded of Lenin's mausoleum, except that the leader cannot be seen but only touched. Is it actually him, or someone else?

Berlin Biennale, 2012. The *IllumiNation* project of the Budapest theater and performance art group Krétakör is launched in Budapest to end in Berlin. It addresses national identity (more specifically Hungarian national identity), its articulations, and critical exploration. A contest is announced about what, in fact, it means to be Hungarian. Any person or group of people is eligible to run, so the whole spectrum of political colors shows up, from the extreme-right wing to (left-) liberal-rights activists striving to legalize pot. Many of the candidates end up in the Theaterdiscounter in Berlin to dispute, in front of a largely German audience, what Hungarian-ness is. The German viewers seem a bit ill at ease to observe this odd contestation.

The scene is still the Berlin Biennale, 2012. A Roma Hungarian curator, Tímea Junghaus, intervenes in the problematic of the unfinished memorial proposed by the city council and the government, situated between the Bundestag and the Tiergarten. Standing by the monument of the Sinti and Roma victims of the Holocaust, an elderly group of Roma intelligentsia and a group of young Roma curators make a public statement, thus completing a lengthy meditational and research process.

Budapest, January 2012. The Slovakian-Hungarian artist Ilona Németh's exhibition in the Ernst Museum consists in a refusal to exhibit (*Dilemma*). Her original intent was to showcase her interviews conducted with the philosopher Ágnes Heller, but instead she closed down the exhibition space. This gesture came across as a protest against the ignoble harassment of Professor Heller and several other philosophers roused by progovernment media campaigns evoking Hungarians' darkest historical memories.

A snapshot from the Internet, 2011. The photo goes viral on Facebook. A picture from the video clip for the song "I Don't Like the System" (*Nem tetszik a rendszer*), the soundtrack to the series of demonstrations in Budapest at the end of 2011, can be seen on the front page of CNN.com,

portrayed as the signature tune and video of the nonparliamentary democratic opposition. As of today, neither the image nor CNN's comment is authentic. But the song is! In autumn 2011, it is entirely believable that the anonymous creator of one of Hungarian YouTube's most viewed recordings has achieved her or his goal to dupe Hungarian Facebook users into thinking, for one day at least, that the world outside has heard the Hungarian opposition's new anthem, which may well be trolled even by the prime minister's kids!

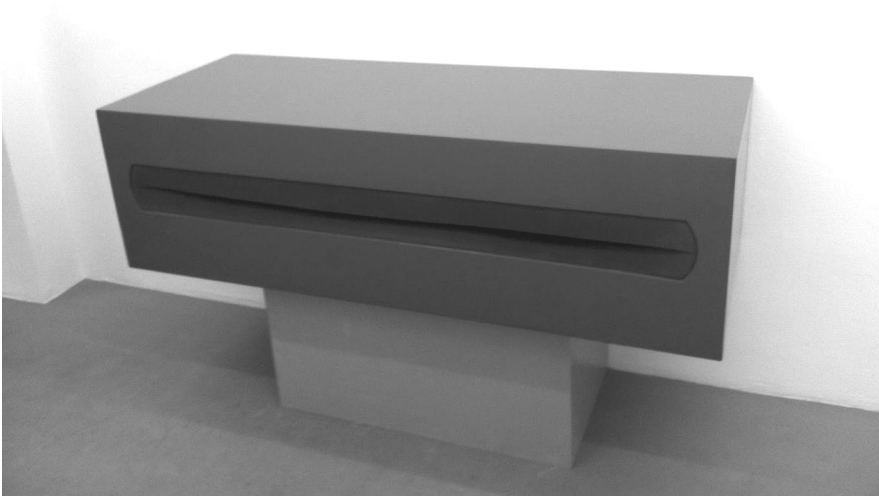


Photo 14.1. Tibor Horváth: *The Prime Minister of Hungary*, 2012.

Object, 80 in. × 24 in. × 32 in. Wood, silicone, polyurethane foam, sponge, gypsum, textile, false eyelashes, and paint.

The series of events surveyed above indicate a trend within the domestic art scene, of a growing visibility of interventionist and socially conscious art in international forums, in line with the media's keen interest in Hungary. But this trend also alerts us to changes within domestic culture. Political commentary has found more direct expressions resulting, in turn, in more acute public attention. It takes about half a minute for a dissenting message to penetrate public discourse, and the audience, once again, seems eager to decipher the codes of political art. Popular culture, such as the hit song "I Don't Like the System," and high culture are drawing closer. Politics seeps into art through social actors as well. "I Don't Like the System" was sung by a young female activist, while professional art-

ists have been involved in civic organizations. Both the artists and their audience are more concerned with social problems. Before the Hungarian National Gallery's opening of the exhibition dedicated to the work of young talent (*It Speaks for Itself*, 2011),¹ when asked in a poll about their motives, a surprising number stated that social processes, the condition of society, and politics exerted a major influence on their thinking and prompted them to react. Most recently, the lectures and public events of *Regime Change: An Incomplete Project*, organized by Tranzit, resulted in overcrowded venues.² Merely a few years ago, such a title would have "guaranteed" half-empty or even emptier houses. But what seemed to be brewing under the surface is now quite visible. In our contemporary scene, the freshest and hottest phenomenon is the kind of art that is engaged with and intervenes in politics. Almost all that begs for our critical attention has a sharp focus on societal issues and politics, or simply on the "situation."

Starting Points

Opinions differ in terms of determining the starting points of today's political, interventionist, and activist wave. In the wake of the regime change, one could sense in the entire cultural scene that, finally, the arts could shrug off the burden of social commitment to freely turn toward their own issues. To quote the writer György Spiró, there's no need for the arts "to substitute poorly functioning societal institutions"³ and to articulate, overtly or covertly, political ideas and interests. The terrain of debate would be parliament and the media. Solely for the sake of political expression, the public would no longer have to attend theaters, exhibitions, or concerts. The arts could, at long last, offer something different. (Those who followed the revival of Hungarian parliamentarism in the cycle between 1990 and 1994 could actually see a livelier theater with sharper and, occasionally, smarter debates than in real theaters!) This tacit consensus about the true role of art outside of politics began to break down in the latter half of the decade. Every critic would mark the shift differently. For me, the starting point would be the photo project *Inside Out* (Saját szemmel),⁴ by Hungarian Miklós Erhardt and Scottish Dominic Hislop. The artists gave out forty disposable cameras to homeless people in Budapest in the period between July 1997 and February 1998. The homeless photographers received no instructions but Erhardt and Hislop interviewed them for comments to the pictures. The documentation of the project was

displayed in art show settings as well. Not only did homelessness emerge in the 1990s as one of the major social tragedies, but it was also one of the issues swept under the rug. Following the pseudo-egalitarianism of state socialism, it was a shock to face masses of people forced out of their homes. For the older generations, the phenomenon brought back memories of the postwar years; for the younger it was embarrassing. Meanwhile the social welfare system was unprepared to deal with it. As a radically new gesture, these homeless individuals could use their own voice to talk about their social world and themselves. Rarely welcomed anywhere, the street people (*utcázók*) appeared in the galleries, while tens of thousands browsed their photos on the Internet. No more could anyone pretend that these people were nonexistent. Retrospectively, what remains most important about it is that the artists gave a tool of expression to the politically unrepresented while at the same time questioning social roles that were taken for granted, including that of the artist.

The 1990s saw attempts to redefine this role. For the new generation, the earlier structures and channels of support for the arts were no longer available. Government funding began its slow demise. The market was not strong enough; besides, it had little interest in art as a practice. Most artists held day jobs, many of them hired by advertising agencies. The necessity of making a living immersed them in everyday life and workaday realities. No longer could they inhabit the proverbial ivory tower or afford to simply scrutinize their own world. Many were looking for new places and spaces. An abandoned movie theater or office space, a crumbling art deco bath—any of these could be occupied by collaborating artists (e.g., the *Újlak Csoport, Kis Varsó*). In general, it became more common to work in groups and pursue collaborations, which gradually brought about new creative strategies and a new awareness.

Polyphony and Silence

From today's perspective, the 1990s seem to have paved the way for today's political turn, but back then interventionist art provoked bewilderment and even a bit of condescension. While the arts agenda in New York consisted of ecological questions, the impact of AIDS and issues of gender and feminism, no consensus existed in Budapest as to whether it was aesthetically valid for the arts to focus on the social world and its problems. Did this kind of art have a place in Műcsarnok, Hungary's preeminent institution of contemporary domestic and international fine art? This

question popped up in 1993, occasioned by a series of exhibitions, a symposium, and a book produced under the title *Polyphony: Social Commentary in Contemporary Hungarian Art* (site-specific works and installations).⁵ Eventually, the artifacts were no longer housed by Műcsarnok. They ended up in Budapest's streets and public places. In keeping with the creators' intentions, city dwellers could not avoid running into them. In 1992, Tamás St. Auby placed a cover on the Liberty Statue that towered over the city. The figure with its two giant eyes struck the viewer as if it had descended from *Ghostbusters* to ask them "What is liberty?" and "Are you really free?" The public and the media were bewildered. The outpouring of *Polyphony's* works, nonetheless, left little doubt about the entitlement of art to make itself visible in places and spaces controlled by politics and the marketplace. Meanwhile, the urban public was growing indifferent. Still searching for its identity, Budapest tended to draw on her own past. In the foreword to *Polyphony*, the creator of the project, Suzanne Mészöly, quoted Miklós Sükösd: "This exhibition documented silence; the silence of Hungarian society, of its artists and of Eastern European societies in general. . . . New social movements raising political and social awareness have not come into being yet." But in the 2000s, increasingly vocal and powerful responses emerged to *Polyphony's* challenge and to society's silence.



MILICA TOMIĆ AND
RÓZA EL-HASSAN
DRIVING IN THE PORSCHE
AND THINKING ABOUT
OVERPOPULATION

Photo 14.2. Róza El-Hassan and Milica Tomić: *I Am Overpopulation*, 2006.
Supersize poster.

"I Am Overpopulation"

Two women artists, Ilona Németh and Róza El-Hassan, cannot be left unmentioned among those who laid the groundwork for the political turn. They both reacted far earlier than others to prevailing issues and trends

both at home and in the wider world. What enabled them to do so were their respective perspectives bound up with their social identities—that is, El-Hassan’s Syrian-Hungarian family background and Németh’s minority position as an ethnic Hungarian in Slovakia as well as her family’s involvement in politics. Besides Németh’s long-standing interest in sex and gender issues and the social construction of femininity, she was involved in politics and Slovakia’s regime change. Most of her oeuvre is “timely, interactive, and provocative,” as Gábor Hushegyi remarked in his monograph on Németh.⁶ In 2003 she set up sleeping cabins on what then was called Moscow Square; the city’s most controversial public space, place where you could see homeless people and beggars along with more affluent urban young people who meet there on Saturday night before going to clubs or concerts. In 2006 and 2007, she posted a mass of signs in Budapest and a small town called Dunaszerdahely. “Would you accept a Roma/Jew/Chinese/ethnic Hungarian from beyond the borders as a family member or neighbor?” asked the signs, referring to Osgood’s attitude scales. In less than a day, the municipal district governments removed them from public sight!

Németh’s most noteworthy works question the relationship between individual and society in a serious and consistent manner, from the 1994 installation *Vesszőfutás*, which evokes the old barbaric practice of beating women with wooden sticks (*vessző*), to the exhibition called *Dilemma* (discussed above). Not only does Németh stand up in this artwork against the attacks targeting Hungary’s “unruly” philosophers but, with the same gesture of silence, she protests against the government’s recent haphazard removal of the leadership from major art institutions.

El-Hassan, a striking artist of the 1990s, came to politics influenced by the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Racism, she claims, is mobilized when a group is viewed as too populous. Her project titled *I Am Overpopulation*, co-created with the Serbian Milica Tomić, investigates ethnic minorities accused of overpopulation. It reflects on how overpopulation is connected with maternity, how Western and Islamic societies are different, and how the notion of overpopulation produces a subjective sense of being superfluous. “I am overpopulation” has become a slogan that she also printed on T-shirts. “In Vienna, we created an 11-meter-wide billboard juxtaposing Jörg Haider, ourselves sitting in a Porsche, and the slogan of the T-shirts,” she related in an interview.⁷ The performance *The Blood Donations* (*Véradások*, 2000–2001) consisted in acts of blood drawing in Budapest, Belgrade, and Zurich—El-Hassan’s response to Yasser Arafat’s staged blood donation, along with 500 others, for the vic-

tims of the World Trade Center attacks of 9/11. In addition, she intended to challenge the attribution of collective guilt to the Arab world. She currently continues her activism by fully dedicating her art to the events of the Arab Spring and Syria's plight.

“Nothing is True”

By the early 2000s, the European and overseas movements critical of Western society, globalization, gender politics and environmental degradation finally found resonance in Hungary. Workshops, civic organizations, and ecological movements began to sprout, including Protect the Future, Green Youth, the Anarchist Reading Group, squatters, and schools of thought headed by sociologist Erzsébet Szalai and philosopher Miklós Tamás Gáspár, respectively. Beyond commentary, these groups encouraged collective thinking, self-education, and even alternative lifestyle experiments. Let us see the trends branching out from there.

In 2010, in the midst of a landslide right-wing victory, the left-leaning Politics Can Be Different (LMP) party, rooted in the green movements, won seats in parliament. The party has been a hotbed that has nurtured the entire artistic and perhaps even cultural wave that inspired the present essay. Around particular artistic organizations and places, a new generation of creative individuals grew up with fresh perspectives on how to practice art. One of these is Artpool, an archive and research center whose young staff has been studying the domestic neo-avant-garde tradition. Another is the tiny and very progressive gallery Liget (meaning “grove”), now rendered defunct by the current political regime.

The 21st century has produced an array of events globally and at home inciting immediate reactions—such as 9/11, the war on terror and its ramifications in Iraq, Afghanistan, the antiglobalist demonstrations, and the economic depression. In Budapest, political art climaxed with the street fights of 2006–2007, which broke out after the leaked speech by then Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány in which he admitted that politicians lie. This art was impossible to ignore, and presented aesthetic forms and language as direct participation in the confrontations. The exhibitions titled *Climate* (2001) and *Repair* (2001) at Műcsarnok addressed global problems, whereas the project called *Moscow Square* (2003), the most discussed public square of Budapest, threw light on the darker face of the metropolis. At that time, participation, public discussion, and criticism defined the nature of the new activism of art.

Csaba Nemes's work *Remake* (2006) broke into the mass media with an animation series that was shown on television channels and was a quick and direct answer to the mayhem in the streets. It was a baffling piece in its effort to make sense of, or at least react to, the astonishing and at times surreal events transpiring in public spaces. Yet the viewer could not figure out the artist's position with regard to the occurrences described. Nemes refused to say yes or no—after all, the artist is no longer an opinion leader. Instead, he attempted to uncover, with empathy, what lay behind the actions. This same approach can be detected in his offbeat short films: *Softies* (*Puhányok*, 2009), *Stand Here!* (*Állj ide!*, 2010) and *Györgytelep* (2012). The works spawned many questions and much introspection. The same could be said about Szabolcs KissPál's exhibit *Smallest Common Multiple* (*Legkisebb közös többszörös*, 2009, Ernst Museum, Budapest), offering no less direct and smart a retort to the street events. His image of the protestor in Nike gear with a sling (*parittyá*) has become iconic. In another piece by him, an EU emblem cleverly linked domestic and European sociopolitical contexts by replacing the stars with pictograms including the swastika and a time bomb.

Such approaches to art are in dialogue with what happens in the streets these days. From the mid-2000s, the leader of the Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), Gergely Kovács, began to redraw signs in public places, such as traffic signs as well as commercial and political advertisements, starting in the city of Szeged and moving on to Budapest. (The title of this section of my essay, "Nothing is true," is a reference to his sign on a billboard.) Kovács does not view his acts as art. And while tagged as the "Hungarian Banksy," the main thrust of his activity is different, as he hacks existing street signs. Founded in 2006, the MKKP came to its own in 2010 when, first, it ran for office in the local government and, second, when Kovács—alone or with others—redrew the campaign posters of the parties with firm strokes and a tinge of irony. Besides physical spaces, the MKKP intervened in media spaces as well by producing a satirical reworking of a news show run by a pro-government television channel,⁸ cleverly debunking its manipulative tactics and rhetorical slippages.

Anonymous authors, too, came up with intriguing works on the Internet. A news reporter from the progovernment television channel turned into an instant meme thanks to his strategic positioning in what was made to appear an empty stretch of street, while reporting on a massive demonstration in front of the Hungarian State Opera House on January 2012 that mobilized tens of thousands under the auspices of the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity)! The following day, this same reporter ap-

peared on the Internet inserted in a wide variety of archival footage of historical events such as the 1945 Siege of Budapest by the Soviet army and the Yalta Conference of World War II. In all of these, “he” claimed that the pictured events had never happened!⁹



Photo 14.3. Csaba Nemes: *Remake*, 2006.
Animation excerpt.

Politics on the Pop Chart

The process outlined above is remarkable not merely because the arts had become, after the regime change, largely self-referential and not particularly socially conscious. It was also odd because sociological surveys portrayed the youth as slumping into indifference toward politics. According to a study conducted in 2009, the cohort born around 1989–1990 had scant knowledge of those years, could not identify the major political figures of the events that transpired, and showed barely any interest in contemporary issues. They dismissed politics as “unclean and impenetrable” having no apparent impact on their lives and generally being something to avoid. All of this was discussed by Judit Kopper in her documentary

Twentysomethings (2009),¹⁰ which explored the attitudes of millennials toward the regime change and politics in general.¹¹ Apathy, detachment, rationality, and an outward look at the larger European context—these were the surveys' key findings. By 2010, however, in the year of the ultra-right Jobbik's election to parliament, the picture changed in that Jobbik began to enjoy increasing levels of support among the young, especially university students in the humanities.¹²

Given this context, the onset of student movements near the end of 2012 represented quite a breakthrough, especially with the mobilization of the Student Network (HaHa). The seemingly apolitical, passive, and undereducated generation—sometimes labeled the Hungarian “blank generation”—suddenly took to the streets with crystal-clear messages conveyed with doses of humor, impressive communication skills, and effective organization. Their target was the government's new education policy. The demographic 48 percent who had planned to try their luck abroad (TÁRKI omnibus survey, March 2012)¹³ displayed unexpected new forms of patriotism and solidarity. In doing so, these students confronted their elders with what they saw as the failure to rebuild society. Thus they managed to recruit educators, university administrations, and parents from alternative political groups to their movement. Shifts in outlook had been brewing underneath the surface. Citing the results of the 2012 survey conducted by the magazine *Hungarian Youth (Magyar Ifjúság)*, sociologist Mária Vászárhelyi states:

“Whereas in 2008, 31 percent of the youths identified themselves as politically right-wing, this figure dwindled to 22 percent in 2012, and within a few years the rate of those identifying themselves to be conservative dropped from 20 to 15 percent... Close to two-thirds of the respondents positioned themselves in the center, and youths on the right and left are increasingly evenly spread out. Meanwhile, the under-30 age group is, once again, overwhelmingly liberal as more than twice as many claim to be liberal rather than conservative.”¹⁴ This article does not elaborate on the nature and consequences of this shift,¹⁵ but two points highlight its pertinence to my topic. Firstly, the student uprisings placed the notions of self-governance and cooperation in the center, just as had been done in contemporary art. And, secondly, their creativity showed another link, exemplified by HaHa's visually superb communications. Utilizing mobile phones, HaHa was able to produce dirt-cheap campaign videos, which superseded the government's at a tiny fraction of their cost. The logos, videos, and flyers could easily be viewed as unique manifestations of political art in that their tenor and iconography echoed those employed by Free Artists.¹⁶

Having attracted public attention in the summer of 2012, the political punk group Kozmosz had its breakthrough during the student demonstrations, commenting on domestic politics and social issues with immediacy, sincerity, and irony. The group's sound was a blend of Californian surf punk and local underground, resulting in highly entertaining and parodistic pieces. Couched in lighthearted party themes and packed with humor, the music speaks of disillusionment and revolt. Kozmosz cleverly captured the zeitgeist.¹⁷ In the song titled "Globally Broke" (*Világszakadtság*,¹⁸ a play on words with the Hungarian word for freedom, *szabadság*, and broke, *szakadtság*) they cite Sándor Petőfi, the canonical revolutionary poet of the 19th century:

Can you see this dance?
 Can you hear this music?
 Those of you who didn't know now can learn
 How the mob is having fun! . . .
 We're here and will set the pace
 We can see everything and will have no break
 I'll send a message up to warn you to be smart
 'Cause our patience is pretty much up.

Over the last decade and a half, domestic pop, the music of the youth, has centrally touched on social and political themes. Commentary has taken a number of forms, but irony has been its most conspicuous feature. One of the best-liked intellectually oriented rap groups, Bëlga, not unlike rapper Sickratman, worked with mutilated rhymes to create profuse scathing mockery of the political elite. But the group's output remained on the level of slightly detached joking, a kind of mic-amplified *vox populi*. In Bëlga's time, the political situation and social climate did not demand more than this mode of playful address. More recently, however, the overall conditions have grown grimmer and reactions have become harsher. As early as 2003, the hip-hop duo Akkezdet Phiai (coming from poetry and slam poetry) kicked off their career by asking "What the fuck, Hungary?" And, let us admit it, this crudely put question has been awaiting an answer ever since—a question, coincidentally, posed as well by the nationally acclaimed hard rock band Tankcsapda. Gangster-rap-influenced Dopeman, also featured in the tabloids, went as far as to curse politicians by name and splice lines from the national anthem into his profanities. Thanks to his good taste, Dopeman clearly separated the two realms so as to avoid slipping into either gratuitous cussing or kitschy patriotism. The

video clip for this song, which, incidentally, led to prosecution for “violating a national symbol,” was shot by Elisabeth Bridge, where in the background one can see the preparations for the vast demonstrations staged on October 23. Although in the ironic project of the One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) movement Dopeman’s election as the alternative president of the republic provided an effective media gag, the brash rapping just barely scratched the surface, letting off some visible steam while making an important mark on the events of the day.

Achilles is Chasing the Tortoise

Budapest, 2008. A major industrial entrepreneur, Sándor Demján, the government’s favored business partner, establishes a cultural grant award, one recipient of which is the visual artist Miklós Mécs, in the Junior Category. He accepts the €7,000, giving one half of it to his sibling, cutting up the remaining stash of banknotes, and creating a spinning animation from it, all in the context of a performance act. In the infinite filmic loop, Achilles is chasing the tortoise. Viewing it as the epitome of the new Hungarian aristocracy’s taste, Mécs turned the entire grant awarding process into a scandalous prank. On the bottom of the small award statue he inscribed a quotation from politicians: “I’ve never lied!—Jörg Haider, Viktor Orbán, Miklós Mécs.” Mécs had wanted to publish this as a kind of *ars poetica* in the official catalog of the event (with an attached mini-portrait of himself featuring a small moustache that referenced the German performance artist Joseph Beuys¹⁹) but the management of Demján’s company did not permit it. This performance, which triggered considerable media outrage, encompassed the full range of the contemporary art scene—its courage, irony, and self-critical stance as well as its direct and powerful social content. His art prefigured radical practices. Despite Mécs’s use of mythological references and reluctance to discuss his presumably provocative intentions, his main themes are power and money.

Fast and instant artistic reactions can be vehement. Also in 2008, János Sugár put graffiti on the VAM Design Center; the company becomes the topic of intense debate in the local art world when it appears on the scene offering young artists lucrative contracts unlikely to be ever fulfilled. In deliberately bad English, the sign reads “Wash your dirty money with my art!” The incident ends up in court, which generates further publicity for the artist and his incendiary act. A year later, in the MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts in Debrecen, Gábor Gerhes exhibits a

plastic bust of the city's mayor, Lajos Kósa. (The exhibition is titled *A Little Hungarian Pornography* [*Kis magyar pornográfia*]). For a brief moment, the gallery's directors as well as Kósa are uncertain about how to react. The obvious answer would be not to react at all. Yet the embarrassment reveals how in Hungarian public life it is still problematic to handle a situation where roles are reversed. To cite the Tranzit Blog's critic, "not only politics can experiment with the citizens, but politicians too can find themselves subjected to someone's experimentation, who, in our case, happens to be the artist."²⁰

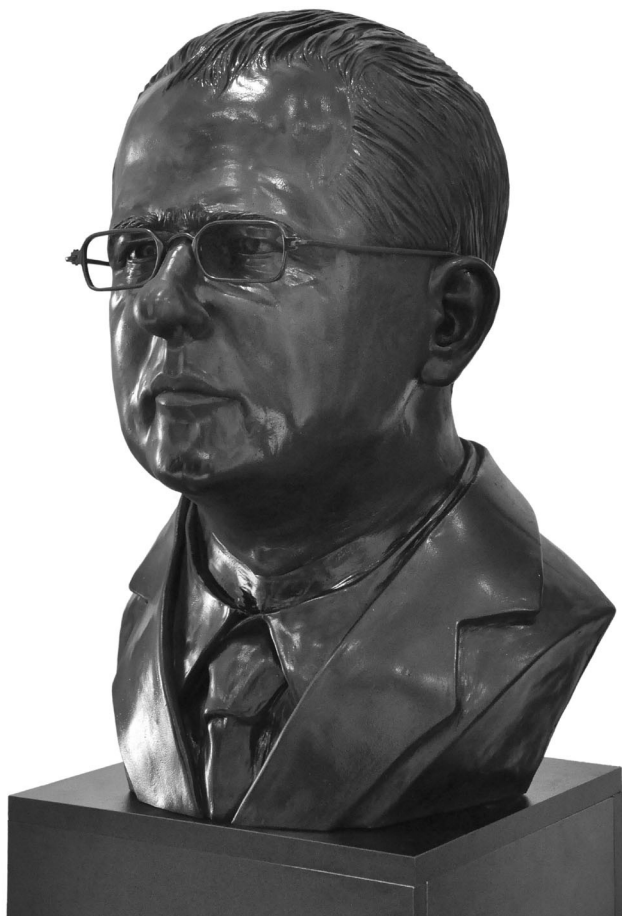


Photo 14.4. Gábor Gerhes: *Lajos Kósa*, 2009.

Painted epoxy resin, 24 in. × 16 in. × 17 in., property of MODEM collection (Debrecen).

With regard to the intervention of art in politics, the critic Zsolt Petrányi alerts us to the problem of practitioners grinding themselves too much in the daily milling. This makes it hard for them to conceptualize the type of action that would withstand the test of time and would convey something about this particular moment in a manner comprehensible to a public situated in other times and other places.²¹ Petrányi questions the durability of these pieces, pointing out how all of them are bound up with the artists' search for their proper role. Should they stay within the realm of artistic expression, the activist content of their work would never reach its target. On the other hand, wearing the activist's hat would erode their unique role as artists.

Tamás Kaszás's work offers an interesting example to contemplate. With his friends, he tied up his art activities with a radically altered lifestyle as a way to prepare for what they view as an impending social and ecological catastrophe.²² The group produces its own food, drastically reducing its consumption and involvement with the logic of capitalist markets. Literally, it aims to achieve sustainability and thus drop out of the system as a whole. Kaszás has, in addition, been influenced by the punk aesthetic, house squatting, and the character of his native Dunaujváros, a formerly industrial city, which predisposed him to work in collaboration with, among others, the members of Plágium 2000.

As for collaborations, there have been a number of powerful and directly political group exhibits in recent years. In December 2010, five artists from Hungary—Balázs Antal, Roland Farkas, Tibor Horváth, Miklós Mécs, and Márk Radics—displayed their work in Sepsiszentgyörgy, a Transylvanian town in Romania, unabashedly critiquing the new cultural policies following the elections. More generally, they deride the methods Hungarian politicians tend to use when they export antediluvian conflicts to neighboring countries, using territories inhabited by ethnic Hungarians as a kind of ideological dumping ground. The title of the exhibition, *Endorsable, Forgettable, To Be Forgotten*, references the notorious policy lines of the secretary of state for culture, Transylvanian-born Géza Szöcs. Szöcs tries to paraphrase the jargon of the former communist party state's threefold cultural policy of "forbidden," "tolerated," and "supported" but it ends up as a slip of tongue. At home the exhibition is shrouded in silence, but in Transylvania it produces an outcry from some local conservative artists. The event itself is a media hack as well, since at home the nonexistent Foundation for National Art introduces the winners of the contest as *Turul: I Know Better*.

Similarly to the *Endorsable* exhibit, the two Young Contemporary Statements (FIKA) shows at Pécs in 2009 and 2011 received little notice

from the domestic art press despite their significance. In accordance with the call for submissions, both events highlighted Hungary's most outstanding social issues such as corruption, street fights, party demagoguery, and the growing sway of ultraright militant groups. From the exhilaratingly diverse palette of art works it would be hard to pick just one piece, so let us see a few. Members of the P.R. Group throw colored balls into the embassies of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and China (*Rainbow Tours: Crossing the Borders While Playing Ball*, 2011). Borsos Lőrinc silences party spokespersons by persuading these well-known media talking heads to be quiet (*Four One-Minute Silences*, 2011). András Kállai's video features Barbie dolls clad in the uniforms of the banned ultraright organization Hungarian Guard (*Marching Barbies*, 2010). Eszter Szabó attempts to turn government propaganda slogans into images (*Strong Hungary*, 2010), while Paul Mutant, in his paintings, deals with territorial exclusion (*This Painting Is Not Available in Your Country*, 2011).



Photo 14.5. Borsos Lőrinc: *Four One-Minute Silences*, 2010.
Four-channel video installation, 1'.

A distinct link may be noted between this generation's ideas and Hungary's neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. As a curious coincidence, one can witness, in research and art collection, the rediscovery and appreciation of Eastern European art of the same time period. The extent to which the young artists' activities are rooted in and will further develop this tradition has yet to be determined.

"My Sweet Country, I Loved You"

Since the mid-2000s, the rise of armed ultraright terrorism in Hungary has hardly been unexpected. However, few would have foretold the actual scale of radicalization or the potential of these groups not to merely exist but to carry out operations. The racist attacks against the Roma people followed by a series of murders stired and shocked the public, including the art world, triggering its immediate reactions.²³ Szabolcs Barakonyi prepared a photographic series about the survivors entitled *Confrontation* (2010). Tamás Kaszás provided multiple copies of his graphics portraying an assault. The visitors of the exhibit are free to take a copy home so as to, one would think, retain the image and memory of the brutality. Csaba Nemes's painting depicts the settings of the assault. Journalist and filmmaker B. András Vágvolgyi follows the perpetrators to the courtroom in his series of reports published in the weekly *Life and Literature* (*Élet és Irodalom*), the sequels forming the backbone of a would-be book on the topic. Benedek Fliegau's film *Just the Wind* (2012) explores the process of victimization. The PanoDrama group create a verbatim theatrical performance inspired by the events based exclusively on verbal documents. In the case of *Word for Word* (2011), they draw on sixty hours' worth of interviews. "I never liked political theater," admits playwright Anna Lengyel, founder of the PanoDrama group, with regard to one of the group's earlier debuts. "But what I'd like even less is to not talk about what's going on in Hungary these days. We perform Chekhov and Feydeau as if murderous racism hadn't reappeared in our streets. As if we hadn't been seeing the slogans of the 1930s on our buildings' walls and in some of our papers."²⁴ The emergence of PanoDrama, supposedly the best in the genre, indicates that the documentary-style, fact-based theater is carving out an ever-growing space in performance art; it furthermore points to the gap that separates it from most mainstream theater in terms of its sensitivity to social problems and its ability to respond to them quickly. Krétakör, the company I mentioned in the introduction of this essay, switched from

traditional theater art to one that is interventionist and oriented toward social issues. This continuously mutating company that adapts to its chosen themes can best be defined as a performative art entity where visual artists, playwrights, directors, and actors collaborate. Documentary theater, generally confronts us with problems, showing them in close-up view. Krétakör even goes beyond this method by intervening, mediating, and initiating dialogues.



Photo 14.6. Szabolcs Barakonyi: *Kisléta* (excerpt from a series), 2010.
Colored photograph, 47 in. × 59 in.

A host of literary texts enter into dialogue in 2012. In the wake of a debate about Hungarian political poetry in *Life and Literature*,²⁵ an entire anthology is dedicated to it entitled *My Sweet Country*, edited by the young literary critic Tibor Bárány.²⁶ I would not claim that in literature, too, political poems are a trend. It is curious, nonetheless, that literary theorists, while busy arguing if civic poetry exists at all, fail to notice not merely vital shifts in the character of the visual arts and theater but in a vast number of existing poems as well—many of them from the political right or in support of the Fidesz-KDNP government—that comment on or intervene in politics. The actual debate is prompted by István Kemény's poem "My Sweet Country" and János Térey's poem "Hungarian Indiffer-

ence,”²⁷ but by that time Zoltán Poós had published his piece on families’ splitting over party loyalties (“The Shame Remained”)²⁸—and he is the first to address this topic. Similarly, Virág Erdős has been coming out regularly with powerful and direct political texts in the daily *Népszabadság*, which were immensely popular on Facebook as well. Is it possible that the political poetry of the past decade eluded the public’s attention simply because domestic dailies had stopped publishing literary works? The answer may well be yes; as it may also be true that 20 years after the regime change, literature is once again seeking its unique role and voice. In the visual and the literary arts alike, we can observe a loss of faith in the marketplace, since it neither helped to solve societal problems nor ensured the livelihood of artists, authors, and other creative workers. To make a living from the arts is a long shot. Yet, at the same time, our governments are no less prone to luring artists into their circles than were the top dogs of the party state. And some of the wealthiest capitalists, with a few notable exceptions, use art patronage as a means of self-legitimization and building clientele. There is no doubt that such experiences have played a role in the artists’ keener interest in and sensitivity toward the problems of the vulnerable and lowly “others” in society.



Photo 14.7. Gabriella Csoszó’s photo documentary from the first action of Free Artists, December 15, 2012.

A Pointed Situation, or The Last Days of Autonomous Culture

The end of 2012 witnesses a startling reorganization of our cultural bureaucracy. With a sleight of hand, the government picks up an organization from which it fabricates an inescapable public institution of cultural management, a sort of shadow ministry. This is the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), which came into being as an association of private individuals in 1992. The only reason it assumes the name *academy* is to position itself against the art section forming within the walls of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). In 2011 this society, comprised largely of conservative artists and operating rather quietly for close to 20 years as some kind of a study group, came to be enshrined in the new constitution! The consequences of this legislative act only manifested in November 2012, when Zoltán Balog, Minister of Human Resources, announced the outsourcing of cultural management.²⁹ The MMA thus will receive a subsidy of Ft 2.5 billion from the government; in addition to the Vigadó Concert Hall, it will also be granted ownership of Műcsarnok with control over its management, as well as access to and decision-making rights in virtually the entire system of cultural financing in Hungary.



Photo 14.8. *Atelier Populaire* (András Király's project): *Cultural Policy*, 2012. Net flyer.

By this point, the administration has taken complete control over the complex of cultural institutions, through centralization and draining all funding. Using the rationale of cost-effectiveness, the administration shuts down institutions, all the while sustaining a constant sense of employment insecurity in the apparatus and suppressing all professional autonomy. Evidently, “culture” comes to be envisioned as a shop window, a philistine enterprise of the state bureaucracy, and everything deviating from this ideal is suspect.

The MMA represents a qualitatively new development. Its bloc-like organization, reminiscent of the state socialist era, serves the purpose of having artists gather in it and, *pro forma*, governing themselves. In reality, however, fully autonomous cultural funding systems, rife though they were with conflicts and debates, came to be replaced with one organization that is amenable to government control and ideological policing. The MMA proved more than the artists’ community was willing to endure, and resistance built up against it on an unprecedented scale. An action group named Free Artists is formed of artists, educators, and students. They hold several demonstrations, the most potent of which involves the peaceful but rather noisy obstruction of the MMA.³⁰ No less noteworthy is the wave of resignations they set off. So far, 11 former members have announced their intent to leave the MMA due to their disagreement with the organization’s strategy and the statements of its president, György Fekete.

Fekete’s person merits a bit of attention. A successful interior designer in the 1980s and the deputy secretary of state for culture in the first democratically elected government in the early 1990s, he is now 80 years old. His record includes a long series of antidemocratic and anti-Semitic statements made in the press, including statements about the internationally renowned writer György Konrád, a dissident who was harassed and jailed in the Kádár era. In contrast, Fekete received commissions, gained recognition, and grew financially successful. Having unexpectedly resurfaced in 2012 to purge Hungary’s artistic institutions, Fekete personifies all that is repugnant in the administration’s cultural policies. No wonder he immediately is imitated as an Internet meme. His characteristic gray pageboy hairstyle can easily be grafted onto any photo on Facebook; his “mask” is downloaded and repurposed. And although specific persons are of no great relevance to the MMA, Fekete’s gray wig has turned into a symbol of unquestioned loyalty, subservience, and court art in the universe of web-based communication.

Not only by their actions do the members of Free Artists and their colleagues draw attention to themselves; but, as we have seen, so does their

aesthetic, exemplified by T-shirts decorated with spray paint, net flyers resembling stenciled graphics, and ironic video art works. In one video, a boy is reading out an MMA statement pledging loyalty to the government and pillorying Hungary's Western critics. While the little boy is genuinely struggling with the convoluted and insincere text, portraits of MMA members spin on the screen.³¹ Irony and ridicule are not merely proper communication tools to deal with the phenomena weighing on our culture these days; they also uncover the essence of the state's cultural policies. What is currently happening in this realm can't be regarded as anything but a cruel joke. No one could have ever foreseen that the very concept of artistic autonomy would be coopted and twisted around by the government through the MMA pretending to represent the independence of art and its practitioners! At this point, it is impossible to tell whether the art produced under the pressure of this dire situation will prove ephemeral or communicate meaning beyond the here and now. And what to make of the possibility of Free Artists's actions being documented one day in a museum?

Simply as a documenting of the times, this body of art is invaluable. Furthermore, in our local art tradition, a "deed" or "action" may imply any or all of the adjectives *artistic*, *human*, or *political*; none would be considered superior to any other. At the time of writing this conclusion, aside from the rebellious Free Artists, resistance to the unbridled tarnishing of the art world is meager. Historically, culture is a "soft field" in that the social actors' organization and ability to represent their interests is rarely robust. Yet this situation is intensifying. For the first time in the post-socialist era, one observes an administration's attempt not only to revamp existing cultural institutions but also to tamper with the cultural "software," wrenching away the control over canon building from the professions. Taking at face value what Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in his 2010 speech to conservative intellectuals, in which he forecast a changing of the guard in the cultural elite and talked of "a beautiful, noble, and elegant" life, one may argue that Orbán expects not only loyalty but exemplary action from cultural workers, such as the teaching and educating of the populace in a manner that harks back to the ideals of the historical Christian middle classes. The MMA was created solely to realize this vision.

Another occurrence, unprecedented since the demise of the party state, has been the ruling party and its media's witch hunt against artistic creativity. The once decent daily *Magyar Nemzet* tried to cite specific artists and viciously ridiculed "superfluous" culture.³² But what the powers that

be may not realize is that no “other” culture is available, that no valid canon exists to meet the political demands of this regime. Even as the irredentist and anti-Semitic writers of the 1930s have been successfully included in the national school curricula, the highly influential modernist literary tradition associated with the periodical *West (Nyugat)* of the same time period cannot be erased. The MMA may lure a few creative (and suggestible) individuals to its ranks with stipends of Ft 150,000, but such mercenaries will not, and indeed cannot, produce canonic art. Similarly, the government will not succeed in its quest to find the so-called forgotten or neglected artist of the past 20 years, to be rehabilitated as its own celebrity. Quite simply, no such individuals exist. And if politically autonomous and critical art practitioners become excluded from their proper institutions, they will go underground, as they indeed nearly always do in oppressive societies: in terms of location, political art is already underground!³³ Whether it will grow more muscular will, paradoxically, depend on the establishment’s next moves. If it exerts more pressure on artists, further encroaching on creative and personal spaces guaranteed by the theory and practice of democratic society, the reactions of artists will in turn become ever more fierce, oppositional, and radical.



Photo 14.9. Szabolcs KissPál: *Paradigm*, 2008.

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- 28 Zoltán Poós, "Maradt a szégyen" [The shame is what remained], *Élet és Irodalom* 54, no. 35 (September 3, 2010).
- 29 "Az államtitkár ellentmond miniszterének?," *Népszava*, November 7, 2012, http://www.nepszava.hu/articles/article.php?id=597926&referer_id=friss (accessed August 23, 2014).
- 30 Gabriella Csoszó, "TILTAKOZÓ demonstráció az MMA-közgyűlésen / 2012.12.15. Budapest," photo blog, December 15, 2012, <http://freedoc-gabriellacsoszo.blogspot.hu/2012/12/tiltakozo-demonstracio-az-mma.html> (accessed August 23, 2014); "MMA Protest #1 / Szabad Művészek," YouTube video, 2:51, posted by "szabadmuveszek," December 23, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XGUQks8OPc> (accessed August 23, 2014); MMA website, <http://www.mma.hu/sajto/sajtokoezlemenyek/584-sajtokoezlemleny-az-mma-2012-december-15-i-koezgyuleserl> (accessed August 23, 2014). On December 15, 2012, artists and activists disrupted the general meeting of the MMA. Cabinet member Zoltán Balog was also present. "The MMA is exclusionary but art is free," their signs stated. The protesters also orchestrated the distribution of flyers, read out their contents, and urged meeting participants to resign from the MMA. They were eventually forced by security guards to leave. One MMA member went as far as physically assaulting the artist Csaba Nemes. Among several others, photographer Gabriella Csoszó published pictures of the action on her blog. This photo blog is Csoszó's own project where she represents the demonstrations of students, Free Artists, and other democratic oppositional movements, also making these images freely available for pub-

lic use. The event was also recorded on video and posted on YouTube. Importantly, the MMA's own website neglected to report on Free Artists's action, and its pictures of the general meeting do not hint at any disturbance.

- 31 "Magyar Művészeti Akadémia állásfoglalása," YouTube video, 5:11, posted by "szabadmuveszek," January 17, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDBxvr7PU6Q> (accessed August 23, 2014).
- 32 "Egy milliárd 'műalkotásokra'" [One billion for so-called art"], *Magyar Nemzet*, February 5, 2011. The government's accountability officer investigated the past few years' investments made within the framework of public-private partnerships. Included in the agenda was the Hungarian Universitas Program, started in 2005, responsible for renovating university and college buildings. In line with legislative measures, a specified amount of resources was to be spent on art pieces, and some contemporary pieces were to be moved from outdoor urban spaces into public buildings. These art pieces and their creators provoked the slandering article in the daily paper *Magyar Nemzet*.
- 33 Nagy Gergely, "Létrejöhét a helyzeti underground" [A situational underground can easily develop], *Műértő* 15, no. 5 (2012): 12. This is non-verbatim citation from József Havasréti.

From Belarus to Hungary: Lessons from a Traditionalist Revolution

Balázs Jarábik

Comparison: Why Hungary is Not Belarus

Comparison of these two countries may spark controversy for many reasons: in the West, Belarus is seen as a pariah nation. When I first compared Hungary and Belarus at a conference dedicated to Eastern Europe in Copenhagen three years ago, a high-ranking Hungarian diplomat present at the event protested, calling the comparison “impossible and misleading.” Recently, however, critics of Hungary’s political developments have been pointing to Belarus. This factor and my own background as an ethnic Hungarian from Slovakia having watched both Hungary and Belarus for over a decade propelled me to write this chapter. I do believe that failure to consider lessons from Belarus may lead to a superficial and simplistic understanding of the Hungarian situation—just as it happened in Belarus.

To sort out the major and most important difference immediately: despite its “constitutional counterrevolution,”¹ Hungary remains a democratic country where governments are still held accountable through free elections. Undoubtedly, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán rolled back the previous constitutional order, reduced checks and balances, and used its constitutional majority (gathered with 52.7 percent of the votes in the 2010 parliamentary elections²) to significantly increase the power grip of the ruling Fidesz over public institutions. Still, it functions by the letter of democracy, though it may breach the spirit of the democratic contract with its authoritarian behavior. Making decisions by force, not consulting with stakeholders, fostering high political polarization, and playing zero sum politics all do bear a resemblance to Belarus.

External factors at play in the two countries are fundamentally different: Hungary is member of the EU and NATO, while Belarus is in the Moscow-led Eurasian Customs Union (planned to turn into Eurasian Union in 2015). While Minsk pursues Eurasian integration due economic benefits,³ Hungarians had a choice to decide on integration by democratic means.

Hungarian history, its social and economic structure,⁴ and its transition are also (in some cases significantly) different from those of Belarus. Hungarians, although clearly disappointed with their political elite and tired of a “constant transition,”⁵ are not keen on facing the potential consequences of an authoritarian path.⁶ Hungarian society is much more layered and would resist a Lukashenko-type closed autocracy.⁷

Although it has increased control over the branches of government and reduced the influence of foreign actors, Fidesz attempts to build neither a highly centralized nor a closed type of authoritarian government. Hungary lacks not only an external financial backer—what Russia is for Belarus—but also the clout and practice that the Belarusian security forces hold over society. Although Hungary’s civil society is relatively weak in Western terms, it is still more vibrant compared to Belarus’s overall resignation when it comes to reforming the political system.

Thus, the Hungarian diplomat in Copenhagen had a point. These two political regimes are indeed different: Hungary has been moving toward a nonliberal democracy,⁸ while Belarus became an illiberal autocracy⁹ almost 20 years ago. However, what I raised at the conference were the similarities in popular support for the policies of Viktor Orbán and Alexander Lukashenko, as both of them enjoy popular support. Thus, Hungary and Belarus are not similar in terms of overall development, but perhaps comparable in terms of the political processes influencing their transition.¹⁰ In this chapter, I shall attempt to first define the comparative framework as traditionalist political development, then walk the reader through the factors surrounding the consolidation of Belarus’s illiberal autocracy to arrive at implications for Hungary. If these lessons from Belarus prove useful in Hungary, and the country’s civil society encourages a more sensible international approach toward Hungary than was the case in Belarus, I will have achieved my goal.

My Copenhagen story had an unexpected ending. The Hungarian diplomat approached me during the lunch and jovially told me, “You know, I had to do it.” I was too shy to tell him that having such a self-defensive reactionary “tête-à-tête” is what Belarusian diplomats used to do.

Comparative Framework: Traditionalist Political Development

Both countries can be characterized as failing to produce genuine change in the behavior of their political elite. The fall of the Soviet Union did bring a managed transition in both cases, though in different political circumstances. Alexander Lukashenko's team had a democratic mandate to make a power sharing deal with the serving bureaucrats, while Hungary negotiated its amendment of the old constitution before the first round of democratic elections. Drawing some common lessons and parallels from political processes—such as transitional experience, geopolitical framework, functioning of political actors, state of institutions, political polarization and authoritarian political leadership—may provide some guidance as to how “traditionalist”¹¹ policy making works in practice. Both countries' leaders returned to past (different) policies; it is the patterns of their political behavior that make them similar.

1. Transitional experience

This suggests a major difference: following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus experienced a very short transition period, while Hungary has gone through a constant transition. In Belarus, the democratically elected Lukashenko (with 80 percent of the votes in 1994¹²) lived up to his electoral pledge to reinstall a centralized system that in some policies, procedures, and particularly symbols resembles the former Soviet Union.¹³ Given that Lukashenko was running against the entire incumbent regime in 1994, his victory was “revolutionary.” Most importantly, he was following a framework of consolidation (i.e., the presidential system) previously created by the ruling elite. By unexpectedly winning the first presidential election, Lukashenko stepped into an already designed political heritage. Although it was partly forced, power sharing between Soviet-era bureaucrats and the hungry new supporters of the Belarusian president created an elite mix of consolidated public institutions that has been running Belarus stably and relatively successfully in terms of both governance and economy.¹⁴

With the performance of the current Orbán government, Hungary's path is often viewed as a circle expanding from the quasi-socialist regime of János Kádár toward the quasi-capitalist current regime.¹⁵ Hungary's transition—attracting foreign direct investment early on, but failing to reform the very high state redistribution, combined with a culture of tax cheating and widespread corruption¹⁶—did not result in the embracing of market capitalism. Importantly, neither Hungarian institutions nor social inertia changed

to keep up with expectations. Avoiding paying taxes and dues and exploiting state benefits (a pattern that began under the Kádár regime) continued after the political changes. The reform path lost its relevance as political polarization increased. As zero-sum politics escalated—Fidesz even rhetorically denied the right of the left to govern in 2006 after it lost the elections—the elite of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) was fearful of taking real leadership. Rather, the SZDP bought time by increasing debt in a desperate effort to fulfill its unrealistic election promises. As a result, Hungarians, socialized in and nostalgic for the Kádár era and seeing themselves increasingly as losers,¹⁷ turned to what appeared a radical solution.

2. Geopolitical framework

Transitional processes in Central and Eastern Europe are often brought into focus through a geopolitical lens. From this perspective, transition in Central Europe was about the region's Euro-Atlantic integration while "color revolutions" enjoyed the limelight in the East. Both processes are often simplified in the West, as even with the EU membership some governance "traditions" were not changed but prolonged.¹⁸ Many Hungarians had hoped that accession to the EU alone would result in major economic benefits and improved living standards, but these expectations were backed neither by serious efforts at government reform nor by the necessary support of citizens. The result was widespread disappointment and a tendency to blame external factors: 71 percent agreed that their country's economy had been weakened by the economic integration of Europe.¹⁹ Similarly, the color revolutions brought new leaders, but the new governments were largely unable to fulfill domestic expectations (particularly in Ukraine). Compared to these dramatic events, Belarus's postindependence transition attracted less interest. The country was in a relative (power) vacuum, more isolated from the international community than any other country. In the absence of Western geopolitical factors, the transition was managed locally for the most part, while Russian intervention in 1996 supported the consolidation of the Lukashenko regime.

Hungary was successfully integrated into NATO and the EU, but Fidesz won a constitutional majority amidst a global economic crisis and a long-brewing institutional crisis within the EU. This contributed to, but did not cause, Orbán's power grab by turning the EU into a scapegoat just when Euroskepticism was on the rise across Europe.

3. Anachronistic political actors

The Hungarian middle class was the driving force toward fulfilling the European dream (i.e., Euro-Atlantic integration) after the fall of the communist system in Hungary. But middle-class Hungarians came to see the communist regime of János Kádár in the 1980s as the golden era of their own prosperity. They also came to view the market economy in rather “suspicious terms” and associate it with high gains for a few “capitalists.”²⁰ As one leading dissident-turned-politician put it, “Hungarians wanted to keep socialism and get rid of the communists, and instead they got capitalism with the communists.”²¹

At the same time, indicators such as several million Hungarians’ choice of a private pensions system over a state one, or the refusal of 80 percent of voters officially to register in 2012 speaks to the contrary.²² Hungarians may not be disappointed in the ideals of democracy, but they certainly do not like the way domestic politics are practiced. The constant transition within “anachronistic political forces” resulted in the triumph of zero-sum politics.²³

In Belarus, it was the “Soviet traditionalists” (pensioners, workers, farmers) who overwhelmingly voted (once in 1994) for what turned out to be an authoritarian model. Although the presidential system was created by the ruling elite, the determination of the Lukashenko team to stay in power was great and resulted even in the “disappearance” of political contenders.²⁴ Years of regime consolidation have resulted in the majority of Belarusians consenting to exchange some political rights and freedoms for “stability” of income and social guarantees, an exchange in which fear of the government’s repressive behavior and intolerance of political dissent played a significant role. Anachronistic political forces—those that are inward looking and that use historical pretext and justifications—limit attempts at modernization, mitigating political change while encouraging zero-sum politics.

In both countries, little self-reflection has been apparent on either side of the political spectrum, and civil society has been unable to either address or resist such massive political polarization. Large external “rent” (subsidies) from Russia and (much smaller) Western support toward the opposition are used, but not intended, to preserve the status quo.²⁵

4. Democratic institutions

Transition processes were complicated in these cases due to the weaknesses of institutions, or more precisely, how and for what purposes the elite were using the newly developing democratic system. The latter could not cope

with the legion of “rent seekers,” in large part composed of members of the former communist elite who kept their economic positions. Hungary’s case (far from the only one) is a classic example of what consequences such rent seeking has: a country increasingly dominated by organized interest groups that pressure for loopholes in order to directly reap the benefit of these loopholes.²⁶ This practice of wealth generation has been shielded by the very same members of the elite pursuing the path of Euro-Atlantic integration. However, once the countries were admitted, Brussels lost its previous level of political leverage,²⁷ while political polarization then erupted in full. The classic “naming and shaming” strategy may work in a more integrated country,²⁸ but in Hungary’s circumstances this may create more resilience.²⁹

In Hungary, as in Belarus, the political system remained captive to the interests of the former communist nomenclature. However, in Belarus the Lukashenko team managed to make a power sharing deal with most of the gray nomenclature cadres³⁰ while Orbán declared a revolution against them.³¹ The Hungarian supermajority uses the constitutional mandate to justify the “Rule of Law Revolution”³² as in 1989; the “formally legal but in reality illegitimate communist legislature enacted the comprehensive modifications of the old constitution after peaceful negotiations between the representatives of the authoritarian regime and their democratic opposition.”³³ Although nowhere else in the region have constitutions been so dramatically altered,³⁴ Orbán and his Fidesz party were part of the democratic roundtable negotiating the transition. Therefore, their revolution and their rhetoric is taken by Western institutions and governments as surprising in both tone and content.

5. Political polarization

The constant fight for position and resources has led these two countries to a high level of polarization. Although loyalty to political sides and parties is not a Hungarian specialty, nowhere else was the emerging civil society—as well as media led by strong personalities and journalists after the transition—captured by the political sides. This has not only cemented but justified rent-seeking techniques. Polarization also prevented the building of modern political parties as the core of newly emerging democratic institutions. As a result of the long polarization, in both cases the middle class finds itself thrown between the two political sides, unwilling and unable to choose between them.

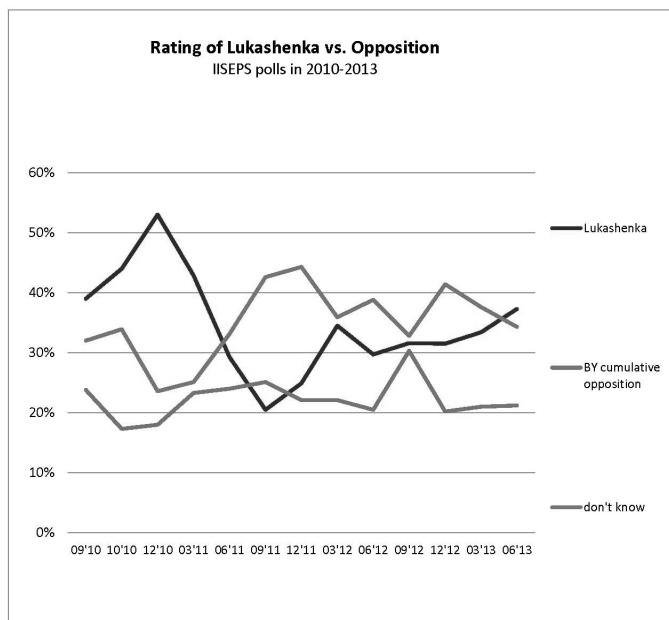


Figure 15.1. Rating of Lukashenko vs. opposition.

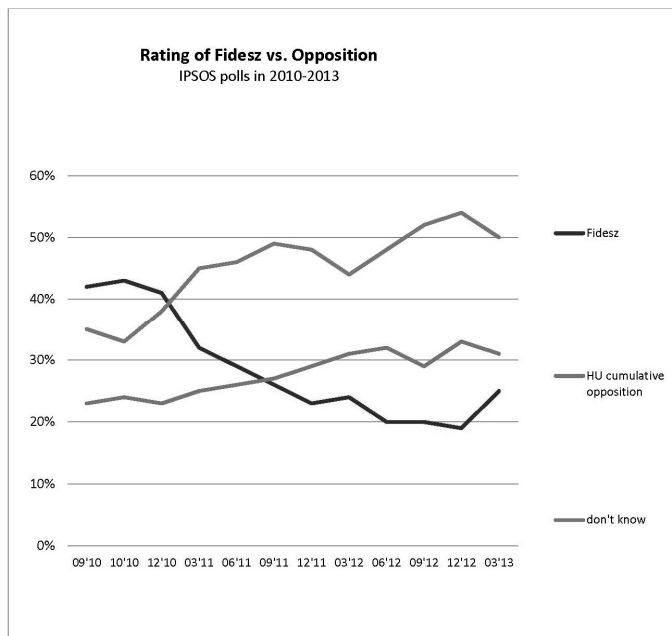


Figure 15.2. Rating of Fidesz vs. opposition.

6. Political leader as source of authority

In both cases, special emphasis is placed on the political leader himself (landlord in Belarus, national savior in Hungary).³⁵ Both of them were seen as using “force” in achieving the desired change in the political system (authoritarian in Belarus, controlled by one party in Hungary)—but their tools differed dramatically. Media control patterns are therefore comparable: the electronic media in particular come under control, its emphasis placed on the person of the leader. In both cases the Internet remains free and dominated by oppositional or independent-minded outlets, but in both countries citizens gain the largest share of their information from the electronic media. The ruling elite has made external factors and actors part of their justification narrative, the main idea of which is that only the ruling elite (in Hungary) or the ruler (in Belarus) can “save the country.” This helps to reframe the ruling elite’s interest on behalf of the “nation” (Hungary) or the “state” (Belarus). The leaders of both countries increasingly tend to justify their local decisions at home referring to external actors, especially in defiance of threats that are stated to emerge from such sources.

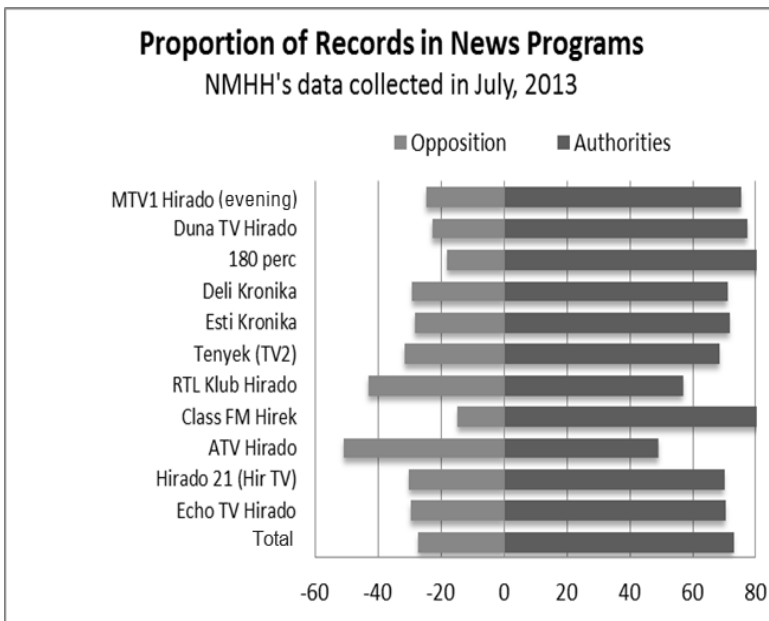


Figure 15.3. Proportion of records in Hungarian news programs.

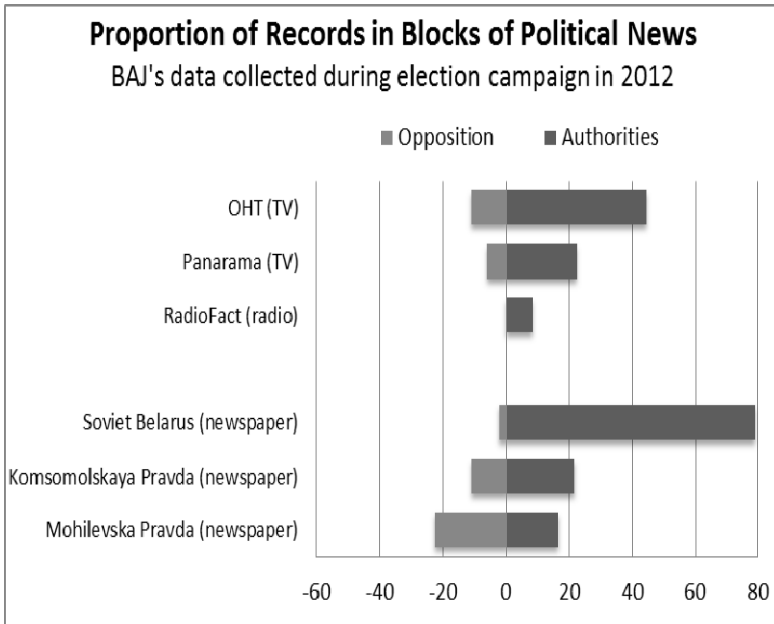


Figure 15.4. Proportion of records in Belarusian news programs.

Factors of Consolidation in Belarus: A “Traditionalist” Regime

In Belarus, democratic transformation has not been simply delayed: during its 19 years of existence, it has developed as an authoritarian but functional state.³⁶ Although the Belarusian government functions in a restrictive and politically repressive manner,³⁷ it has managed to fulfill some important expectations of its citizens.³⁸ It is traditionalist, as it has been conserving policies (and elites) strongly rooted in the Soviet past, but at the same time it does not oppose modernization of key economic sectors. This tends to mean that more modern equipment is bought, rather than modern management methods of key economic sectors being employed.

The Belarusian regime has been described as a joint-stock company, in which shareholders support Lukashenko and get their dividends in return, but with “no tradition of promising shareholders freedom and independence instead of dividends.”³⁹ In this system, “oligarchs” are simply larger shareholders of the regime, and are far from being controlling shareholders. As there are no functioning legal norms or courts that would allow for the protection of private property of any significance without the approval

of the regime, Belarusian “oligarchs” are simply managers who, like other citizens, can be stripped of their property or freedom at any moment.⁴⁰

1. Social contract

It is clear that, upon consolidation of the regime, Belarus’s citizens have no democratic means to change it.⁴¹ For this they receive in exchange a rather wide range of social benefits—employment (but not working is a challenge⁴²), affordable housing and services, reasonable government services in key sectors, access to consumer goods, ability to leave the country, and even tolerated access (as officially it is banned) to Western funding for civil society organizations and opposition. Democracy is bartered away for social services.

2. Russian subsidies

The key behind Belarus’s social contract is its external donor, Russia, which pays the bill of the nontransformation. Credit here is not due to Alexander Lukashenko: Belarus managed to continue with the old Soviet redistribution system as an external rent immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. What has changed is the tone: whereas under the first Belarusian prime minister, Vyacheslav Kebich, Minsk was asking (if not begging) for loans, under Lukashenko it first requested, later demanded, and most of all “extracts” subsidies in exchange for security guarantees and political loyalty.⁴³ Minsk expects Moscow to pay for its loyalty as Russia’s most Western ally.⁴⁴

3. Economy

Minsk has embarked on a number of steps in the area of economic policy: (1) keeping manufacturing jobs and employment while using the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets and “bureaucratic trade” to continue the Soviet policy of bargaining between ministries and enterprises; (2) modernizing some flagship companies (potash industry and oil refineries); (3) making the economic output of the private sector gradually grow (now at 30 percent while in Russia it is at 60 percent⁴⁵), and (4) ensuring high-level Russian subsidies that made Belarusian foreign and public policy and society increasingly dependent on Russia through what has become an exit strategy for Belarusians, who need no visas to work there.⁴⁶ The high number of EU visas issued (with around 800,000 Schen-

gen visas annually, Belarus occupies the top global position)⁴⁷ is also another factor here: it helps to reduce potential social tensions at home. The notion that “the more Belarusians travel to the West, the more democracy” may not apply; “the closer the West, the less intention to have it at home” seems more accurate.

4. Repression

The low but systematic intensity of Belarusian repression is best understood as “preemptive authoritarianism.”⁴⁸ The Belarusian regime deploys restrictive legislation against many forms of activism and uses these laws on “test” cases. This makes repressive tendencies (the actual cases) low grade, but sets limits on political activity quite effectively. Repression is used on political opponents almost exclusively, and only rarely on ordinary, politically unengaged citizens. As a result, with “no mass violence the authoritarian rule in Belarus has leveled the playing field of Belarusian politics, with only primitive forms of political life outside of the presidential palace left.”⁴⁹

5. State-controlled labor force

The authorities ensure high employment, but the prevalence of short-term (one-year) labor contracts for all state employees puts virtually everyone at risk. This possibility of losing a job has, however, diminished in recent years as state-sector salaries have stagnated and possibilities for employment in the private sector have risen.⁵⁰ Labor migration, in the form of an “open-door policy,” particularly to Russia, also serves to release pressure from the Belarusian labor market in times of crisis,⁵¹ but it does create shortages of certain professions at home. The infamous Presidential Decree No. 9, introducing what was dubbed “serfdom” by some Western media,⁵² was designed to tackle this very problem.

6. State management

Democratic institutions were circumvented with the 1996 referendum. Rent-seeking was also put under a stricter control, although the constant dropping of Belarus in the Transparency International index⁵³ shows that the regime must give concessions to the bureaucracy under its unwritten power sharing deal. At the same time, there exists a constant threat for state officials or entrepreneurs⁵⁴ to be accused of noncompliance with a

wide-ranging and extended list of rules and regulations. Anticorruption efforts look serious both in terms of declarations and deeds and constitute an integral part of the regime's cohesion. Lukashenko won the first presidential elections on an anticorruption ticket, and rotation within the state service is partly ensured by firing or jailing officials for corruption. In 2012, the Investigative Committee examined roughly 600 corruption cases,⁵⁵ while during the first quarter of 2013 alone 581 such cases amounted to a staggering 85 percent of all registered crimes. According to the trial-monitoring NGO Platforma, nearly 30 percent of all convicts are sentenced for crimes related to corruption, while according to official data there are 38,000 people in jail.⁵⁶

Putting these numbers into the "fighting corruption" category would be a misunderstanding. They rather represent a "human resources policy" of the authorities, designed to create loyalty to the regime. The secret services collect information broadly, and also expect that this information will be used later. Perhaps not accidentally, Lukashenko is believed to be surrounded by high-level officials (including those in law enforcement) who know they could be prosecuted at any given moment. The fear this evokes also has a collective dimension: it is shared across echelons of the regime, and it makes Lukashenko and members of his entourage "brothers in crime." Therefore, the regime's interest is to strengthen its own cohesion by corruption cases while continuing to disseminate the external (Western enemy) image. In this context, the more radical the rhetoric of the opposition (or the West), the higher the cohesion of the regime is likely to be.

7. Opposition and Western policies

Lukashenko's monopoly transformed the government itself into an amorphous mass of managers unable to work on their own, created a highly polarized society, and exhausted and reduced the clout of the opposition. Since 2001, the latter has been pinning its hope on electoral revolution, while there has been very little or no self-reflection as to why this has failed three times in a row.

Although Western media attention is laudably high, Belarus could be yet another case study proving that Western media attention alone is not the harbinger for change at the local level. Moreover, such media pressure may help the incumbent or dictator justify restrictive and repressive policies at home. Western assistance has become—because of repeated and long-term focus on elections, as well as expectations and hope for an elec-

toral revolution—humanitarian in nature (supporting individual survival), and been kept increasingly isolated from the country. An alternative path might direct aid to a number of sectors in a concerted way, which could lead to incremental democratic change.

The high-intensity zero-sum politics, as well as external factors footing the bill on both sides of the political spectrum, has led to a political polarization that has essentially emptied the middle. The well-intentioned Western policies have, in the long run, contributed to—although not caused—a reinforcement of the status quo. These factors have led to the current political situation, in which most Belarusians desire change⁵⁷ but reject the political actors who propose such change. Silently, the West thinks Belarus is lost owing to its membership in the Eurasian Customs Union and because of the high level of Russian subsidies. This frames the low level of Western interest and directs its remaining focus almost entirely on the condemnation of human-rights violations.⁵⁸

Implications for Hungary: Behavior Matters

János Kis calls Orbán's politics "a brutal warfare"⁵⁹ and, indeed, in his behavioral pattern the Prime Minister does resemble Alexander Lukashenko. Both of these political leaders come from small countries where there is a large difference between the urban centers and the countryside, and where relationships with bigger neighbors form a key feature of national character and state function. Both of them grew as leaders of a conservative electorate in turbulent times, following previous leaders who sought to make the best of emphasizing their countries' weak points in order to attract external sympathy and support. A recent obituary of Gyula Horn⁶⁰ observes that "he understood, embraced, and represented the Kádár doctrine, which forged a virtue from our country's relative weaknesses and lack of importance in order to pursue national interest" while "trying to make sure the former elite had a meaningful role."⁶¹

1. Frustration from capitalism

Both Lukashenko and Orbán took over when the combination of frustration over local forms of capitalism and newfound independence made it possible to pursue national interest in a different way. They both built up and "protected" their power base, seeking to isolate themselves as much as possible from external influence by manipulating images of external

enemies. Fiona Hill's explanation of the political path of Vladimir Putin as a "classic Russian conservative pursuing the goal of strengthening the Russian state"⁶² echoes this. The political socialization of these "new Eastern conservatives" is comparable: they all grew up politically in "institutions that operated beyond public scrutiny and without fear of legal or other constraints".⁶³ KGB in the case of Putin, Fidesz in that of Orbán (where he has never been seriously challenged), and a *Kolkhoz* in that of Lukashenko.

2. Traditional support base

Part of that electorate in need of protection comes from the traditional Hungarian countryside of small cities and towns, long counterbalanced in Hungarian history by cosmopolitan Budapest. This part of the traditional society pushed Hungary into the EU, eager to learn the culture of the big city as well as that of the West.⁶⁴ However, their small-town, closed, and clan-like society combined with the elitist media attacks encouraged a return to their original political roots and ways. Fidesz, itself behaving like a political clan, appears not only familiar but acceptable to rural voters.⁶⁵

Beyond Budapest, Hungary's civil society, like Belarus's, is limited. "The forces that helped liberate society in Poland—the church and the labor unions—were largely absent in Hungary, hence the changes were led by the reformist elite."⁶⁶ Moreover, civil society was quickly usurped by the newly founded political movements, and a two-party system quickly emerged in Hungary. Journalists and the media in general took sides, and civil society became a largely politicized scene by the end of the 1990s, further emptying the political middle.

3. Letter but not spirit of contract

Compared to Lukashenko's attack on Belarus's fragile institutions in the flawed referendum of 1996,⁶⁷ Orbán plays within—in letter if not in spirit—the framework of democracy. "Putting the country into Fidesz" was possible using a democratically gained constitutional mandate.⁶⁸ It is the constitutional agreement that emerged after 1988–1989 between the communist elite and the democratic opposition that is being changed. Hungary's "Founding Fathers" in 1989 believed that a complicated election system together with a strong Constitutional Court would protect the new order, but the disastrous periods of MSZP-SZDSZ governance played

into the hands of the center-right. Thus, it is not the change of the constitution that is new in the region, but rather the forceful centralization by constitutional means that alienates more Hungarians and the country's Western partners.

4. State management

Part of the growing frustration at home is connected to government management. Orbán has orchestrated the greatest centralization in recent Hungarian history, using loyalty within Fidesz's closed circles as his organizational key.⁶⁹ The loyalty factor, however, limits the ability to improve state management. To make public institutions more effective, adoption of Lukashenko's policies of using law enforcement and the fear factor may eventually be chosen as a prime strategy. However unlikely this may appear at present, the ongoing legislative "blitzkrieg," combined with the lack of sound implementation of policy, is likely to alienate a continually growing number of citizens and voters.

5. Wealth redistribution

The core of Orbán's policies differ here from those of Belarus: redistribution of income and wealth in Hungary has moved to the advantage of the upper layer of the middle class⁷⁰ (a small group), whereas in Belarus wealth distribution attempts to support the Belarusian lower middle class (a much larger group). As for the declared vision of strengthening Hungarian entrepreneurship, steps taken by the authorities are more suggestive of a reward for political loyalty than actual building of local enterprises.⁷¹ However, despite its efforts to curb foreign capital and businesses, Orbán's government understands that without them the economy would not be able to survive. It has shown the capacity to compromise both with the EU as well as with businesses—but only when it has no other choice.

6. External donor

Despite cherishing its independence and trying to keep a distance, Belarus's dependency on Russia is growing in every aspect, not just financially.⁷²

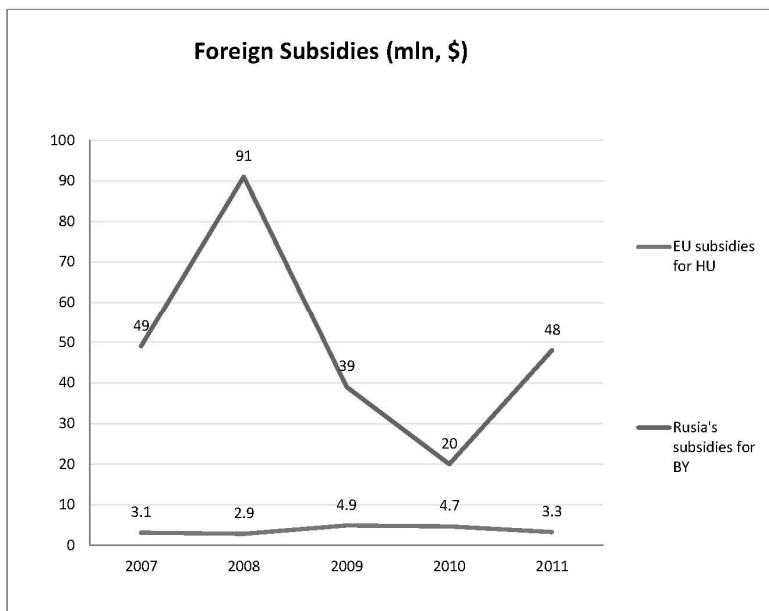


Figure 15.5. Foreign subsidies to Belarus and Hungary.

Hungary's relations with the EU are different, although its financial aid⁷³ is substantial; the government avidly seeks to decrease EU influence at home.⁷⁴ Both leaders are similar in the manner in which they play with both the markets and their external supporters, attempting where possible to avoid playing by the rules. Still, Hungary does not have the luxury of having so permissive an external donor as Russia is for Belarus. Orbán reportedly admitted that looking East is largely symbolic, aimed to season his rhetoric at home about the decline in the West.⁷⁵ The goal is to minimize Western influence at home and to maximize Fidesz's control over the country. To achieve this goal, the government regards its written obligations within the EU quite seriously: nine years after the accession, it managed to reduce the country's budget deficit,⁷⁶ and the EU lifted its budget monitoring as a result.⁷⁷

7. State of actors before elections

The upcoming 2014 elections come at a very sensitive time for all actors. The government is unlikely be able to keep up with its rhetoric on economic growth, despite the extra resources it secured from the nationalization of pension funds, special sectoral taxes, and the nationalization of

savings banks. It is likely to focus its attention on populist policies, printing money as well as investing in visible national projects in order to win the next elections. It is worth noting that the new parliament will have 200 members, down from the current 386, under the terms of the public administration reforms of recent years, which are aimed at streamlining and containing the proliferation of public authorities.

Brussels, meanwhile, will continue to worry that the Hungarian government will not be the only one using and strengthening the already high anti-EU sentiment being expressed across the continent.⁷⁸ Indeed, “revolutionary” and anti-EU rhetoric is likely to strengthen as the 2014 parliamentary elections approach. In turn, this rhetoric is likely to tarnish Hungary’s prestige on the international scene.⁷⁹ The Hungarian parliament’s anti-resolution to the European Parliament’s resolution based on the Tavares report⁸⁰ signaled that it would continue to be cited as necessary to “protect” the Hungarian electorate from the external “threats” amassed by the EU and its like.

Meanwhile, the opposition has engaged in precious little self-reflection. It rather seems to hope to escape by targeting Orbán as anti-democratic—with the same actors in place and with the help of the West. This tactic closely resembles the one (i.e., “regime change”) that the beleaguered Belarus opposition has been trying to pursue since 2001. It did not work out there, where self-reflection is also largely missing in opposition circles. Given the government’s regular assault on Belarus opposition activists, a strong victimization tendency has further limited attempts at self-reflection. Hungary’s opposition is well advised to do its best to avoid this path.

Epilogue: What Next?

The April 2014 parliamentary elections brought another landslide as well as a single-mandate constitutional majority for Fidesz in a reformed and thinner parliament. This was largely the failure of the opposition to mobilize its voters, as Fidesz lost a significant number of votes. In the May 2014 European Parliament elections, the right-wing radical parties made significant inroads. Hungary’s traditionalist model of quasi-state capitalism is neither vindicated nor remarkable anymore. Within this context, Fidesz now appears more mainstream.

By changing the electoral law, Fidesz tried to ensure its own position of power. At the same time, these changes made it even more difficult for

the opposition to muster a constitutional majority.⁸¹ A well-designed campaign featuring targeted populism (saving foreign currency credit holders and reducing household bills), an effective propaganda machine (letters from the prime minister to Hungarians), a growing media empire, the capacity to mobilize supporters (the infamous peace marches), policies bringing in new voters (making citizenship available for Hungarian minorities abroad), and an incredibly self-focused opposition made a compelling enough case for many Hungarians to vote for the incumbent.

The opposition in its current composition largely resembles the previous ruling elite. The only serious attempt to recouple—the Together 2014 (E2014) coalition—has, after a promising start, been dragged back to the mainstream opposition discourse founded on the belief that rotation at elections is inevitable. Indeed, the MSZP has never lost an election in which it ran as the opposition—until now. The MSZP and other opposition formations were under self-imposed pressure: running against Fidesz based on an antidemocratic theme sounds compelling and easy, and also has the potential to gain support from the West. The hope was that denial of Orbán might bring yet another change of government as the necessary short-term fix. This proved to be an illusion.

The opposition may be missing some factors that have changed since 2010. Firstly, the conditions for opposition politics have shifted, since its own electorate has practically collapsed. The previously two-vector politics has become uncertain, with new parties emerging on the left and center-left only, while Fidesz maintained a large degree of internal coherence, anchored in part by the threat of the radical Jobbik party to its right. Secondly, Fidesz reacts to the changing geopolitical framework (Europe's challenges), and while its answers might be more radical than the perceived decline, its opposition still seems rooted in the geopolitical framework of the 1990s (i.e., pre-EU integration). Thirdly, not only the opposition but also the Orbán government deliberately try to involve the West (particularly the EU) in the domestic political fight in order to channel frustration toward the workings of the global economy among the losers of its reforms.⁸² Thus, the more critical the Western engagement, the more its rhetoric may appeal to these Hungarian citizens looking for a scapegoat. Fourthly, compared to the opposition, Fidesz's structure and platform⁸³ do represent a coherent vision and a clearly established program, albeit one that sounds a bit too "radical" for many.⁸⁴

Also, in the case of Belarus's opposition, this framework raised the tactical question, well before the elections, of whether the Hungarian opposition might be in a stronger position if it were to not only recouple but

also decouple, that is, instead of relying on “unity against Orbánism” it were to target various layers of the electorate. The rationale is that the center-right cannot be destroyed, but it might be defeated while remaining active in politics. Importantly, the Orbán system might be targeted less on the basis of what a postcommunist party can offer and more from a “pure” capitalist platform based on the protection of private property and the rule of law. Accordingly, there have been attempts from E2014 to move to the middle—where most of the voters actually are. What this means is that its politicians have been trying to compromise with the ruling government on a number of issues. Following such a tactic, the quality of state management could have been a key argument, especially as E2014 could have mastered the capacity, the manpower, and the intellectual finesse to position itself for such a role. Such a compromise—it is not Fidesz’s vision that is necessarily wrong, but rather its radical rhetoric and flawed implementation based on political loyalty that is making Hungary worse off and more isolated—may facilitate a new framework where the policy of confrontation could potentially shift to the policy of competition.⁸⁵ However, these attempts were essentially halted when the MSZP-SZDSZ elite pushed its political actors toward the status quo based on the belief that a change of government is possible only with unity. In this case, the “united opposition” turned to Western engagement in the hope of ratcheting up its marginalized position with the help of the international media. This approach appears to have helped cement the beliefs of Fidesz’s core—the higher the Western engagement, the more the prime minister’s style is vindicated.⁸⁶

In the event that the opposition musters an electoral victory in 2014, it will have to govern with a strong opposition, and important government agencies will remain under significant influence from locked-in appointees of Fidesz. The incoherence of opposition structures would likely make a ruling coalition fragile vis-à-vis an opposition with the ability to mobilize against those usurping power once again.

With its newly gained constitutional majority, weak opposition from the left, and stronger opposition from the right (Jobbik), Orbán is under no pressure to consider changing his behavior. Hungary’s relations and positions vis-à-vis the West will be increasingly dictated by the right-wing threat but also by the Ukraine crisis and the Russian threat. Self-reflection on the political left seems inevitable unless—as in Belarus—it chooses to cement itself into the position of (political) victim.

What is left after the elections is the belief, or hope, that the majority of Hungarians would like to see a return to a more consensual governing

structure that involves the participation of all (save, in all probability, Jobbik). Hungarians, after all, are much less concerned about “threats from the EU” than from further East. Returning to constitutionalism seems like the holiest of grails to most intellectuals writing about this subject, but the path from “confrontation toward political competition” must be walked by political structures. For this to happen, Hungarian civil society needs to mature further, but, as the Belarus case suggests, high political polarization and zero-sum politics present serious challenges to such a process. The opposition may wish to recall a historical parallel: if Orbán is running a revolution, there will be a need for compromise. After Lajos Kossuth, Hungary searches for its Ferenc Deák.

In this polarized situation, the EU needs to “play the ball, not the man.”⁸⁷ Building new momentum in Hungary is possible, but it is not going to be as simple as just moving to deny Orbán and Fidesz. The real long-term challenge in Hungary, just as in Belarus, is not regime change, but rather genuine social and political change.

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Dark Viktor

Joseph B. Juhász

What follows is a loosely bookreviewish, psychodynamish-litcritty interpretation and exegesis of two recent books: Igor Janke's best seller in Hungary, *Hajrá, magyarok!*,¹ a biography of Viktor Orbán; and the collection of essays *Magyar polip*,² edited by Bálint Magyar. The two books are about the person of Viktor Orbán, about the regime and the party he leads, and about the contemporary situation in Hungary. I also will write about these three things, and in the process discuss and dissect the two books, which are significant not merely or only in Hungary, but also to anyone seriously interested in Hungarian affairs, world politics, or the current state of the world.

Understatement. Orbán is a polarizing figure. Let me illustrate from my texts. The first mention of Viktor in *Magyar polip* is in the fourth paragraph of the foreword: "Fidesz, the underling of the chieftainship of Orbán's reign, did not wish to restore to the former owners or their heirs their capital that had been nationalized by the communists. Rather, they wished to gather, under the magical cover of legality, these riches to be their own personal property—not merely with the status of powerless³ owners, private bourgeois civil citizens, but actually as the empowered long-term possessors of political power."⁴

In *Hajrá, magyarok!*, I am skipping the publisher's foreword, and go on to the author's foreword to the Hungarian edition. "To begin with, I need to make one thing clear. This is not an objective book. I do not wish to create the impression that I am looking at my hero from a distance. This is my subjective, personal narrative of Viktor Orbán, that man whom I saw for the first time in my life at Heroes' Square, at the reinterment of Imre Nagy. I was there at the invitation of Fidesz, along with activists from the Independent Student Union (NZS). I have been following him ever since with a great deal of attention, and the longer I do this, the more

I see him as an interesting figure. Interesting, because he is not unequivocal. He is not a black-and-white figure.”⁵

Before I comment further, back to *Polip* for a moment. I skip to the English-language afterword to *Magyar polip*. “The new conceptual framework describing the system (i.e., the earlier unmasking of the Mafia state by the lead author, as described above—to the use of government power to expropriate property—the Mafia state) had a revelatory effect on a significant segment of Hungarian intellectuals concerned with political science, sociology, and economics.”⁶ So, if this is not itself a scholarly work, at least it is a work by scholars and intellectuals for an educated audience. And again, it borders on Revelation. Yet, as we saw, it begins with purple prose. It is attempting to provide an intentionally two-dimensional analysis of a social, political, religious, economic, sociological, ethnic, racial, and psychological phenomenon as if it were a Mafia state.⁷ Interesting. In doing so, it perhaps deflates the Duce of this phenomenon: Perhaps he is also two-dimensionalized? In any case, it is a polarizing accusation to say the least.

Janke is the upside down opposite of the scholars and intellectuals anthropologized in *Magyar polip*. A self-described journalist, he presents himself, and is presented as, the Common Man on the street, or, actually, right on Heroes’ Square. We have here the Journalist-in-the-Street, painting the picture of a Common-Man-as-Local-Hero; but mind you, he is a Hero with a Thousand Faces, for remember, he is not all good. Janke, addressing the Hungarian masses, portrays his and their hero as a complex, multi-layered personality—but a hero nonetheless. Interesting. Why this complex staging? you may ask . . .

Any psychodynamish-litcritty analysis would begin by saying that any assertion affirming that something is not the case always masks an intentional or unintentional assertion of its contrary. When Dick Nixon says, “I am not a crook,” everyone knows he is giving away something... This is basic psychodynamics, basic literary criticism. The lady doth protest too much, methinks. Janke is using an effective rhetorical device in saying Orbán is not a simple hero, and in part he is saying the opposite of that. I shall return to Janke in a moment.

Back to *Polip*, though. I think that it would be simplistic to say that *Magyar polip* is merely a personal attack; underneath its purple passion is a deep sense of betrayal, of having been treacherously sold out to, of being a victim of trickery and deception and spy-craft and unfaithfulness. A significant segment of Hungarian intellectuals concerned with political science, sociology, and economics feel and felt betrayed by the events

following the collapse of the “Old Order” in 1989. With the concept of the Mafia state, they have been endowed with a revelation, an epiphany, which explains their sense of loss. They fully expected a full-blown parliamentary democracy to emerge from the collapse of the Kádár regime. Not only did they expect this but they thought it was the fair and just thing—the fair and just outcome of the struggle to undo what they believed to be the last vestiges of Rákosi-ism. Further, if I may be permitted to play the paranoid Hungarian Ashkenazi for just a moment, they may very well have been led on by some of the same forces in the West that had stabbed the 1956 revolution in the back; they may have received assurance that a Western-style parliamentary system was in the bag, just being delivered from the Erste österreichische in Vienna. It may have turned out that this was never in the bag, but in someone’s *pockets*.

These intellectuals struggle to express their frustration to their natural audience: the influential minority of well-educated, urbanized, cosmopolitan, liberal, West-leaning, Hungarian bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. Their disappointment and frustration has by now turned purple. These guys are literally kvetching. The person of Viktor Victorious is an insult to their sense of decency, morality, destiny, providence, historical idealism, and polite behavior. They have nothing but contempt for the masses of Hungarians that support the Fidesz Order. Caught in a web of their own making, in which they now know that even were there such a thing as an unrigged election, the coming 2014 elections would not be a reprise of 1994 and will result in a clear Fidesz victory. Undone by their own faith in the People, there is little room left but to spit, spray, spew, and hiss contemptuous and calumnious invective. Gotcha.

So, back then to Janke’s rhetoric: in warming over and rebaking Janke’s *Napastnik: opowieść o Viktorze Orbánie* to make preaching to the converted seem credible, the veiled hero worship had to be elaborated and developed. A proper epic hero has to be presented as three-dimensional. Luke Skywalker-Orbán cannot be flat any more than Odysseus can. The youthful hero has to be complexified before he can be properly worshipped as a demigod. Whether it is the young Bilbo or the young Frodo, or more aptly that seeming bumpkin, Sam, he cannot be without blemish. After all, Bilbo was a burglar and a dishonest riddler, Frodo would finally have held on to the ring had Gollum not bit off the ring finger, and as for Sam Gamgee, he is a spy and an eavesdropper. Batman, the ultimate Dark Viktor, *is* the Dark Knight. Count Almásy ... but more about the Hungarian Patient later.

The Viktor Personality Cult that is being nourished by *Hajrá, magyarok!*, cannot be the cult of a simple White Knight.

And also, he *is* a comical character, a comical figure. He has the wrong background to be where he is. Part *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, part Dick Nixon, 100 percent *Mickey Magnate*.⁸ Too much of a commoner to be head of government. The clothes make the man, and they are ill fitting. Somehow, this local hero cannot simply be lionized into a cult figure . . . So, Janke must shilly-shally for at least three reasons.

I will mention here, that the word *magyar*, or its plural, *magyarok*, in the titles of the two books has more than one meaning. It is neither a simple nor an unequivocal term. It seems to refer merely to a person's nationality. But, it may also refer to a person's ethnicity. For certain individuals it may refer to a race. It may even possibly refer indirectly to someone's religion. It would depend on the context, as it would, for example, in Japan or Korea. Although there are mighty few non-Japanese and non-Korean nationals of Japan and Korea, you may well say of someone there who is known to be a Japanese or Korean citizen that she is not Japanese or Korean. This is also true to a lesser extent, for example, in France or Germany or Sweden. . . . So, "Go For It, *magyarok*!" is not such a simple exhortatory exclamation. Nor is *Magyar polip* a simple descriptor. One usage could be taken to be jingoistic. The other could be taken as invidious. This might be difficult for some people to understand, but both are, to say the least, very loaded and subtly polarizing titles. *The titles themselves would polarize many readers*—Romani, Jews, Turkish, or Chinese immigrants and any one of the many ethnic and racial minorities in Hungary on the one hand, and ethnic-racial Hungarians on the other. Finally, the Fideszites sure like to think of themselves as ethnically and racially pure *magyarok*. As for the urban elite, their great-grandparents read *Pester Lloyd* rather than *Pesti Napló*. And they know it. All the more painful. (Parenthetically, it may be easier for the reader to understand why Viktor is a comical character to either crowd by saying that one assumes that his great-grandfather certainly did not read *Pester Lloyd* but also, on top of that, that he did not read *Pesti Napló* either.)

It is not unknowingly that Janke reveals that Orbán's personal favorite is Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Janke dismisses this film as an ordinary spaghetti western. He knows better. As does Viktor. Initially reviewed as a run-of-the-mill spaghetti western, it is now exalted as one of the all-time greatest motion pictures ever. The potboiler, the pulp fiction that has been ennobled as High Art. There is a very powerful subtext here for the cognoscenti. More of this later.

How many Poles does it take to make a polarization? It takes, with the grace of God, one Pole, Janke (ironic name), and one Hungarian, *magyar*

(ironic name; small *m*) (and his *posse comitatus*). To put it simply: the Orbán character polarizes Hungary between the large majority of “Hungarians” and the significant and influential minority of the Westernized or Western-leaning educated citizenry—and the Outsiders. Perhaps some vague analogy to other orphans of the Ottoman Empire? More of this later.

Symptomatology, Palpation, Diagnosis, Prognosis, Treatment Plan

We begin this medical checkup by noting that the very physicality of these two works is, in medical or psychodynamic language, symptomatic. They are buboes. To be sure, there have been, and are, other heads of state that are polarizing figures. To be sure, Hungary is not the only nation-state either. At the barest minimum, forces similar to those at work in Hungary are also at work in Russia and Japan. Yet, there is also something very local, very Magyar, very *mit ein Ungarischer Tam* about these symptoms.

What? Yes, the local urban intelligentsia opposes Putin and Abe (as do the outsiders, the Chechens or the children of the Korean diaspora in Japan). Yes, they have a nationalistic agenda and are supported by the Ethnic Common Man. Yes, there is covert jingoism supporting them both. These are overlaps, and they are significant.

The easy part about the non-overlaps is to note that neither Putin nor Abe needs the support of a foreigner journalist to arouse Russian or Japanese chauvinistic jingoism. There would not be a big ballyhoo either in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, nor in Tokyo or Kyoto, nor would Putin’s or Abe’s website give big play to an admiring biography by, let us say, a French journalist in the one case or a Javanese one in the other.

I well remember the book fair held on August 20, 2013, at Trinity Square. For those of my readers unacquainted with the Magyar calendar, August 20 is a holy day and a holiday, the commemoration of the miraculously preserved right arm of Saint Stephen, first king of Hungary. It is a religious-nationalist-ethnic feast and sacred commemoration. This book fair was in the shadow of Matthias Church, the coronation temple of the kings of Hungary, and also of an equestrian statue of the Saint-King. Just on the other side of the church is the Hilton. *The* featured work at this book fair? *Hajrá, magyarok!*

The Russians and the Japanese have nothing like this. There are analogues, but this is a distinctly Hungarian bubo. It shows a basic lack of self-confidence; a feeling of inferiority; a sense of being watched, ob-

served, spied upon; the fear of being deceived—and a stubborn, lingering Poloskaphilia.⁹

The more difficult part is to isolate the specifically Hungarian flavor, the *Ungarischer Tam*, of *Magyar polip*. I quote from the Wikipedia entry for polyp: “A polyp is an abnormal growth of tissue projecting from a mucous membrane. If it is attached to the surface by a narrow elongated stalk, it is said to be *pedunculated*. If no stalk is present, it is said to be *sessile*. Polyps are commonly found in the colon, stomach, nose, sinus(es), urinary bladder and uterus. They may also occur elsewhere in the body where mucous membranes exist like the cervix, vocal folds, and small intestine.” The Hungarian word *polip* translates in English not only as *polyp*, but as *octopus* as well. In Hungarian it has both meanings. Which is meant depends on context; sometimes there is wordplay. There is something gross and disgusting, unseemly, queasily carnal, about this Hungarian polyp. For, as Octopussy, he also carries this black ink, lives under the sea, has eight arms, and is covered in suckers. More than anything else, he has false eyes to deceive other creatures, to decoy his enemies and even friends. You know. There *is* Russian snide. There sure is Japanese snide—take it from me. But this *Magyar polip* is Magyar Snide! This level of mastery of innuendo takes a member of the *pesti* Hungarian urban elite to achieve. It is as worthy of Karinthy as it is of Molnár—no János Arany here. A possibly cancerous growth, a bubo on the wall of the uterus of ...? In the cervix of ...? Under the uncircumcised foreskin of ...?

So, these symptoms are local—but as we have already pointed out, not just local, almost global as well. Few things I say on the radio get my fellow news analysts on the International Press Roundtable and the audience of our politically progressive Boulder-Denver radio station more annoyed and angry as when I point out, as I have for years now, that despite all prophecies and beliefs to the contrary, neo-nationalism and religious revival are alive and well throughout most of the world. So, it is my opinion that the Hungarian Patient may be specifically Hungarian, but his symptoms are a local version of a pandemic—of what some see as a worldwide malaise. I have already pointed at Putin and Abe, the Russian Patient and the Japanese Patient. Obvious. Please note that they both combine chauvinism with traditional religious righteousness. *Fidesz*, as everyone knows, spells faith, trust, and confidence. The wedding of Nation, Race, and Religion in Hungary is not idiosyncratic. Yes, they may not have a Saint Stephen, I know. Yet you see much the same thing in Iran, Israel, Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, Poland, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and many more countries. Viktor is a symptom of a world-

wide backsliding away from secular humanism, internationalism, globalism, enlightenment, and multiparty parliamentary government. The anger, disappointment, and furious contempt over the inability of historicism to deliver the goods, which is found in *Magyar polip*, is worldwide and truly characteristic of just about all of my friends from Boulder to Budapest and from Brussels to Seoul. And many of the excellent authors in this volume also.

Putin and Abe are rewriting their constitutions. Of course, this is not what they would say. They would say that they are restoring it.

This is what Viktor would say.

Count László Almásy forgot his own name and nationality, his own ethnicity and language; he erased them in the butchery of World War II. He turned himself into an Englishman! It took a Canadian nurse and a Sikh combat engineer to restore his memory and identity. Take this as an emblem.

Prognosis: I foretell that there will be no United States of Europe any more than there will be a true United Nations. This will not happen. People have already remembered who they are. Francis will restore the church; the Patriarch of Moscow is alive and well. Viktor will achieve his Dark VikTory in April.

China

Who can doubt that there are many well-educated urban Chinese who think that China¹⁰ should adopt a government modeled on Western Europe or the United States? Scholars, intellectuals—outsiders such as those relatives of the Magyars, the Uyghurs. There is a tradition of these. I would suggest that the reader not hold her or his breath waiting for this to occur. When Mrs. Clinton lectures the Chinese from Ulan Bator, with the statue of Genghis Khan as the backdrop, that China should adopt a “free-market” system, get past one-party rule, and become a multiparty “democracy,” one can only laugh or cry.

China is neither Russia nor is it Japan—nor is it Hungary. And vice versa. Yet, many Hungarians, including me, believe that we Hungarians may have more in common with the Chinese, the Mongolians, or the Koreans than with the French, the Germans, or for that matter the English. Ralph Fiennes is no Hungarian. And yet, do a multiparty parliamentary “democracy” and a “free-market” system fit Hungarian history, character, culture, or language any more than they fit Mongolia, China, or Korea?

Nationalism in China is neither Abe-style nor Putin-style. Perhaps it is closer to traditional Confucianism. The notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity simply do not fit on Chinese torsos. Of course, what distinguishes China and North Korea from the rest of the neonationalists is their seeming adherence to “communist” ideology. There is also no religious revival to speak of. But, of course, not incidentally, neither China nor Korea,¹¹ both Confucian cultures, have or have had what is commonly called a “religion.” Confucianism is revived—religion will not be resurrected, as it is just not to be found there.

Here, there is a significant divergence from more or less the rest of the world; this is no triviality.

End of medical segment.

Bookworm

Let’s dive a little deeper into our books.

Easy start. *Hajrá!*

Skip to the next-to-last chapter 25. An interview on the terrace of a restaurant in Budapest—Janke interviews Orbán. Perhaps I can summarize this penultimate chapter as well as this testament with an easy phrase taken from Viktor’s lips: “*hazánk szuverenitásának visszaszerzése.*”¹² Perhaps I could translate this phrase into English in about 1,200 pages of single-spaced text, one for each year of Hungarian history. Literally it means “to restore the sovereignty of our homeland.” Okay, *Hajrá!* But forgoing the 1,200 pages of typescript, I would like to elaborate just a little bit. The Hungarian word *haza* (homeland) is a close relative of the German word *Heimat*. Many books have been written about how *Heimat* ≠ homeland. Neither does *haza* = *Heimat*, but it has a similar *Tam* to *Heimat*. Sad to say (?), the Wikipedia article on *Heimat* does a pretty good job. At its core, it is a cultural, geographic, ethnic, geomantic, feng shuiic, and religious attachment to place. Birthplace.

Haza megyek—otthon vagyok. Literally: I am going home (*haza*)—I am at home (*otthon*). In Hungarian, these are two distinct words. You can no more say *haza vagyok* than you can say *otthon megyek*. As in *The Wizard of Oz*, Home, as in Homeland, is a destination, a goal, a destiny. When I am at home (as in my step-parents’ farmhouse in Kansas), this is the temporary resting place where I am residing, but it is not my Real Home. To restore the *haza* is to find the Heavenly Jerusalem, where you could truly exclaim, This Is The Place! Zion. It is the Home of The Nation—the

ethnic-racial-religious-geographic-cultural group. It is reclaiming The Promised Land. As Dorothy says, There's No Place Like Home (it is the best place; it does not exist).

Hazánk = our *haza*. Who are "We"? We Are Magyarok. We Are A Great Nation.

Szuverenitás. This is a recognizably highfalutin foreign word. French. Technical, legal, and diplomatese. The colloquial Magyar equivalent is *önállóság* (independence, to stand on one's own feet). Do not for a moment entertain the thought that Viktor is choosing a legalistic foreign word of art for no reason. He is spitting in the eye of the EU. Give 'em a taste of their own medicine. THEIR "International Law."

Visszaszerzése. To get it back. It's reclaiming. It's regaining. But, when was Hungary truly sovereign the last time? Certainly neither in the monarchy nor under the Austrians. Certainly not under the Ottomans. Certainly not between 1945 and 1989. Get it back from whom? When did we have it last? Perhaps the Horthy interregnum? Perhaps to restore Horthyism? But, in its own words, Horthy's Hungary, even after all the partial restoration of the "lost" territories was *Csonka Magyarország*. Maimed Hungary. A maimed homeland. *Nagy-Magyarország mennyország; Csonka Magyarország nem ország*. Greater Hungary is Heaven; Maimed Hungary is not a country. So were the first-graders taught under the Horthy regime. *Nem, Nem, Soha!* No, No, Never! We will never accept the post-Trianon boundaries. That maimed land is not our *haza*. No, it is impossible to think that Viktor means literally the Hungary of the Horthy era—yet, it is as close as 400 or more years will take us to a truly sovereign and independent state.

The House of Árpád ruled Hungary, so it is said, from *anno Domini* ca. 972 to ca. 1301. In the minds of many Hungarians, this would be *the* period of sovereignty. Named after the chieftain whose son, Saint Stephen, became the first apostolic king, it is this semi-mythical age that is thought by many to be the source of the True Hungarian Constitution and the God-given boundaries of our *haza*. All other versions are inauthentic approximations. Some of the statuary around Heroes' Square depicts concepts about the looks of these founders of the homeland. Begun in 1896, when the millennial year was celebrated, at the height of the Budapest land boom, and completed in the nonrandom number of 1900, this statuary depicts distinctly non-Western looking dudes. Ancestor figures. Truly, these nomadic raiders of the European Ark came from the steppes of Asia and found a promised land. Since 1301, though, we have been wondering what happened to our birthright. But, not to go into matters too deeply

here, in actual reality this is a dreamscape. There was nothing like today's concept of sovereignty or even independence in Europe in 1301 or before. This is either a rearward projection, an intentional error, or really some vague analogue to modern concepts.

Incidentally, here is found the Serbian embassy (formerly the embassy of Yugoslavia), which sheltered Imre Nagy for a while in 1956.

Allow me a digression to *Magyar polip*, please. When people talk of "the chieftainship of Orbán's reign," the truly snide reference is to these Árpád-era pre-Christian invaders, the tribal chiefs, the tribal wild-men, the primitive savages of Árpád's hordes—uncivilized *magyarok*. Not heroes, but rather Asiatic ignoramuses, savages, *sauvages non nobles*. Not the ancestor figures of *Hajrá, magyarok!*, but rather the uncouth growth or rather an atavistic throwback that *is* the *Magyar polip*.

Dark Victory.

Having made that easy start, we move forward to a more difficult field. I shall pick the very last chapter of *Magyar polip* to review and analyze. The author is Márton Kozák, former soccer player, sociologist, editor-in-chief, journalist, media person. The closest analog, perhaps, to Janke's character among the contributors to this volume. The title of his essay is *The Godfather's Soccer*. This is the translation given in the English précis. The Hungarian title is *A Keresztapa focija*. The Hungarian is better. I would translate it as *The Godfather's Foci*—*foci* being the Hungarian slang, colloquial term or nickname for soccer ball. The "correct" Hungarian for *foci* is *labdarúgás*—ball kicking. *Foci* is a popular term.

Of course, *The Godfather* in the title of this chapter is that American-Sicilian mafioso Marlon Brando (or should I say Vito Corleone?¹³), immortalized by Puzo and Coppola and Brando, and emblem of the Mafia state. The chapter is, then, a sociological study of Viktor as the Godfather and how he relates to and uses popular sport. *Panem et circenses?*

I translate what I take to be the thesis statement of this chapter. It constitutes the second and the third sentences of the thesis paragraph: "On the other hand, at the end of the day, we discover that for the tyrant who thinks neither of the people nor the nation, neither of the subject nor the predicate, that for him, the final purpose of the revolution he wrought through the ballot box is nothing less than that he be able to have a soccer field, complete with an excursion train in his village, right beside his garden... The train should whistle for him!"¹⁴ This is, in the chapter, the explicit contrast between the mere autocrat and the tyrant: in this case, the contrast between Horthy and Kádár (mere autocrats who did not use their people or nation for personal sport), and the proper tyrant, Viktor.

I mercifully translated *kényúr* as tyrant. This is okay, but I need to unpack it a bit more. *Kényúr* is a compound word. *Kény* means the exercise of absolute power for pure personal gain or pleasure, for a personal whim or whims, for personal sport. *Úr* means lord. A *kényúr* is someone whose tyranny is based on selfish pleasure and whim, pure and simple. A *kényúr* makes sport of his people and his nation. This, of course, goes well beyond Vito Corleone's darkest dreams. This is a description of The Dark Lord Himself. Prince Vlad the Impaler. Nero. Hitler. The polyp has taken up residence in the intestine. Polyp as bloodsucking vampire.

Let it be said that this sentence is but a description of one of the popular myths about Viktor—his village, the soccer field, the pleasure train, the cottage garden, and so forth. It draws on literal popular legend. Any Hungarian reader will be familiar with this rustic scene. The head of government kicking the soccer ball around with his buddies, accompanied by the train whistle from the nostalgic excursion train. A proper popular village theme park, with resident prime minister.¹⁵ The sentence turns the normal personality cult story on its head and unpacks the supposed poison on the apple.

This closing chapter is so purple as to make the opening prose seem not even pale pink. Compared to this purple vitriol, the opening sequence is positively mild! How is one to take such over-the-top hyperbole? Has the Dark Lord taken up residence in Felcsút? Dark Victory Indeed! This is a level of invective that one uses with an adversary with whom one is engaged in a final life-or-death battle. No compromise is possible. It is you or me. It is a declaration of war where in the end one side or the other has to accept unconditional surrender. *Dr. Strangelove* Cold War stuff. Someone here sees Viktor, imagines Viktor, or wants to present Viktor as an Existential Threat. This is not the subtle propaganda of *Casablanca*. It is the blatant propaganda of *Triumph of the Will*. Who is trying to wave a red coat in front of whom?

A passionate attack, dripping with sarcasm at this village bumpkin turned tyrant. Indeed, this is Viktor at his most comical—the little tyrant turned Mafioso. *Miska the Magnate* reborn as *Son of Satan*. Modeled on the Hitler legends? I am having trouble picturing the reader who is taking this seriously. This goes well beyond my circle of friends. Or maybe not. Possibly Ákos Kertész, the Hungarian author and family friend, who fled from Budapest to Montreal to escape the Fidesz terror after what he described as a personal, physical, anti-Semitic revenge attack upon him, might swallow this? I doubt it. Too over the top. I see it as too blatant; I think Ákos would also.

The Felcsút legend is in fact crucial to Janke's narrative as well. As told by Janke, this is high village romance. Chapter 1, mind you. This gives me room and opportunity to dig just a little further into *Hajrá, magyarok!*. Whether by his friends or enemies, Viktor is presented as the inveterate soccer addict and fan. The exclamation *Hajrá, magyarok!* (particularly with the inclusion of the comma and the exclamation mark) could in fact be a cheer! It could certainly be taken to mean "Go, Hungarians!" as in cheering for the national team in an international match.

Team sports.

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité! The proposition that all men are created equal. These are essential creeds of what may loosely be called a modern "liberal" Western view. Who would dare to question these truths? That would be heresy indeed.

As it happens, just as an example, a Confucian worldview would reject these as nonsensical statements on the face of it. Who or what is "free" in this universe? What two things can truly be said to be "equal" in this universe? Can one be everyone's brother? These are Confucian basics.

I will propose that perhaps Viktor is The Enemy of a significant segment of Hungarian intellectuals concerned with political science, sociology, and economics precisely because he brings to what is supposed to be a Western table what could be described loosely as a Confucian worldview. The atavistic throwback to the Asiatic hordes. He is the archenemy, the camel whose nose is under the tent. If we picture a nation or a people or a race as a soccer team, then each player, each coach, each cheerleader, each urinal cake maintenance worker, each head of state will have her or his assigned role, all of them dignified but not equal, not equal in dignity; no one will be free, and all men will not be brothers. This is the Confucian ideal. The "Ode To Joy" shall be silenced.

From the perspective of the authors of *Magyar polip*, Viktor is therefore by this interpretation indeed the Enemy of the People, one of The Devils, the Neroesque or Hitleresque petty tyrant. I can see how this could be the case.

Conversely, it is neither more nor less easy to see that someone may say that the concepts of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* or, for that matter, *the proposition that all men are created equal* may or may not be fictions, but that in any case they are not suited to the local conditions in the Danubian Basin at the present time. This would be a very soft version of the Orbánism being propagandized by Janke. The stronger version would of course be that they are falsehoods, corrosive polyps on the human psyche perpetrated by Enlightenment bourgeois.

I have no trouble identifying which would be closer to the mentality of the Average Hungarian, nor which would be closer to the mentality of the average inhabitant of the District XII or V or the Ujlipótváros in Budapest. Do you?

The Influence of Sea Power upon History

I shall be Toynbee. I shall be Wells. I shall be Herodotus. I shall be Almásy. I shall be Whorf. I shall be Sapir. I shall be Juhász (Vilmos).

I am writing this in USA English, in Boulder, Colorado—though I am using a Hungarian keyboard to make the entry of accented letters easier. This causes occasional horrors with my spell checker, but on the whole it is worth it. The books I am reviewing from here are in Hungarian, my mother tongue. I certainly do not wish to engage in extreme or even mild linguistic relativism, but I do have to point out that there are well-known problems with this kind of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic criticism.

The English spoken in the Forest of Arden, of lamentable memory, found its present form in a nation that ruled the seas, in an empire upon which the sun never set. A global empire. This Amerenglish that has become the International Language has the colonial, Great-White-Fleet mentality built right into the structure, the vocabulary, the syntax, and the grammar of it. The English-Speaking Peoples. This is even more true of written USA English. When Admiral Mahan wrote his *magnum opus*, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, he really had in mind the example of the British, the Britannia who rules the seas, the Britons who never will be slaves.¹⁶ This anthem was the mold for the Great White Fleet, the expansion of America to be its own vast WASP global empire.

Hungarian is not like this. It is not even an Indo-European language. At the Defense Language Institute, Hungarian is a one-year language like Chinese or Japanese, not a six-month one like French or Spanish. Its underlying grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and structure are alien. The Hungarian language in the books I am reviewing does not have embedded within it a sea-based global colonial empire, nor does it aspire to. Many Hungarians perhaps secretly wish this were not so.

Many would say that the sun has set on the British Empire, though it still is surely one of the great powers. Many would add that after Korea, Vietnam, to say nothing of Iraq and Afghanistan, the sun has also set on the American Empire, though perhaps it is still the number one super-power and likely to remain so for many years.

We Americans never really got a New Testament, a second Bible; we have stuck with Mahan through thick and thin. Where is The Influence of Land Power upon History? For if not sooner then no later than Vietnam, a land power successfully defeated a sea power. And worse, an “inferior” technology defeated a “superior” technology. Unheard of.

Russia is and has been a land power. China ditto. Austria-Hungary—Admiral Horthy and the battleship *Szent Erzsébet* to the contrary notwithstanding—also has been, though with perhaps the tiniest qualification. Ditto the Ottomans. Germany tried to get into the game, but with too little too late. The Japanese embraced it.

World War I was surely a watershed. Austria-Hungary was dismembered along with the Ottoman Empire; Germany lost her colonies. Japan soon became a colonial power. The great sea empires, launched with Spanish expansion, soon followed by the other European powers, provided a model for the socio-political system launched from Europe that nearly overwhelmed the world by the end of World War I. It surely seemed that this was the model favored by history. Yet it was out of World War I that the Soviets and the Nazis and the Fascists came. World History 101.

After the watershed of World War I, there was to be a League of Nations. The world had been made safe for democracy. The overwhelming victors were the great colonial sea empires. But what happened?

World War II.

The Soviets won the war in Europe, though of course Normandy did not matter. The Soviets were, and the Russians are and were, a land power. But the Americans won the Pacific war, albeit willy-nilly with the aid of the atomic bomb. This was indeed Victory at Sea! It was, and so it seemed that Mahan had been vindicated, at least in the Far East.

But wait.

Let me continue explicating World History 101. The victorious Soviets had been bled dry by the war, more drained than the Germans and the Brits taken together. This was not by design of their Allies. But after a decade, by the time the 7-year-olds grew to be 17 and another generation could put on uniforms, they seemed fully competitive with the sea powers. Their lame attempt at overseas expansion was quickly stopped with the near-apocalypse of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but they no more dreamed (nor do they dream) of people in Cuba or in Senegal or in New Guinea speaking Russian, dressing like Russians, having a Russian-style constitution or becoming members of the Russian Orthodox Church than of dancing on the head of a pin.

Sure, they would dearly like to see their “cities with commerce shine,” but this commerce is the inheritor of the Silk Road rather than the bound-

ing main. For her commerce to shine, Russia needed neither Suez nor Panama. In fact, Russia readily traded Suez for Hungary in 1956. Russia's great cities are not seaports. Pest-Buda is a stop on the Silk Road.

The war in the Pacific, especially the stripping and unmanning of Japan, opened the door to Chinese resurgence as those who argued against the weak support given by Truman and Eisenhower to the Chiang Kai-shek regime correctly saw. The sleeping giant was awakened with the long march—inland, north and east out of which the phoenix of the new China arose from the ashes after the war.

Let us simply say that the Chinese no more dream of the people in Senegal or Havana or Port Moresby speaking Chinese, wearing Chinese-style clothes, or performing Confucian rituals than the Russians do. The Great Wall was not built for no reason. As any wall, whether in Israel or Berlin or Detroit, it is not merely to keep people out; it is also to keep people in. China, after all, was the destination and the origin of the Silk Road. Budapest is a stop on that road.

It is not as if China were not interested in having its “cities with commerce shine.” But for all its many seaports, it does not need control of the seas to have that commerce shine. It does not need overt or even covert colonialism to compete. Chinese and Russian ain't American English any more than Hungarian is—though the penetration of Amerenglish is deep and hardly trivial. I *was* watching the Golden Globes tonight.

There is certainly a sense in which the czars were tyrannical, and the Sons of Heaven much less clearly so. The style and nature of accommodation were and are, however, quite distinct from the British accommodation. East of Suez is neither Siberia nor Mongolia, nor is it Tibet. I do not mean to be sophistic or overly relativistic here, but one man's terrorist can be another's liberator, as was Mandela. One man's tyrant can be another man's saint, as was Saint Stephen—or Saint Ladislaus (*Szent László*), Count Almásy's namesake, for that matter. That right hand of the saint maimed many a chieftain who would not convert.

Crusade in Europe, as you Americans say. By this book shall you Buy the Farm. *In hoc signo vinces*.

To analyze, then, *Hajrá, magyarok!* or *Magyar polip* in the language of Crusade in Europe or in F-sharp minor, the key of Victory at Sea, is a difficult task fraught with contradictions. This is not far on the one side from translating or transposing from Polish, a distinctly Indo-European tongue, to Hungarian—or for expecting parliamentary democracy in the key of Western Europe to fall on receptive ears in the Danubian Basin.

Either side has to recognize that what is now Buda was on the very frontier of the Roman Empire, in the province of Pannonia, which along with Illyricum formed the eastern edge of the Western Roman Empire, and still remains at the eastern edge of Roman Catholicism. Buda was occupied by the Ottomans for about 150 years. Pest was never in the Roman Empire. Savages and barbarians lived there. There is Transdanubia and there is the Alföld, the Great Hungarian Plain, after all. And Erdély, the homeland of Prince Vlad, Siebenbürgen, Transylvania, this is a part of Dacia—the westernmost edge of the Eastern Roman Empire. Horthy got back Northern Transylvania, briefly. Many Hungarians think that Transylvania and those of its people who are Székely is more “Hungarian” than either Transdanubia, which is for all practical purposes quasi-Austrian, or the Great Hungarian Plain, which is coarse and barbaric. But, its history is more interwoven with Byzantium than with Rome. Oy!

When Viktor speaks of restoration on the terrace of a Budapest restaurant with Janke, is he in Buda or Pest? Surely he is not in Cluj (Kolozsvár). He perhaps dreams of the restoring the entire Carpathian Basin to the Crown of Saint Stephen, of restoring the Kingdom, the Carpathians being Our Great Wall. But the Western Europeans will no more allow that than they will allow Turkey to join the EU. Viktor, you can fight the Erste bank only, perhaps, as far as Jászai Mari Square, the east bank of the Danube. I cede you the Szőnyi Antiquarium and the postcards in it. And not only do the Americans now have their Marine detachment housed on Castle Hill, but they also occupy Liberty Square. Your “sovereign state” will have to make its own accommodation with Vienna and New York, New Haven, and Hartford.

Look here Dr. Magyar. Cool it with the Mafia state already. Budapest ain't Vienna or Prague, much less Paris or Rome, or God forbid, London.

Is Hungary the Sick Man of Europe?

Of course, Hungary is a lot more of Europe than the Ottoman Empire ever was, the latter having been mostly in Asia and Africa. But it is certainly no lack of geography lessons that caused Czar Nicholas to use this “mistaken” phrase; after all, so too was Russia mostly in Asia, and is mostly in Asia now.

Interestingly the Yale historian Huntington, in his classic work on the culture wars, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, divides geographic Europe in two. This is no random view from the window of the club car of the

Bankers. The two parts are roughly as follows: The EU, and he adds to this the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, form the West (i.e., pre-1952 NATO plus ANZUS). The parts of Europe to the east of that, as well as the Asian parts of Russia, being the Orthodox Civilization, form the East. He explicitly includes present-day Hungary in the West, although it is at the borderline of the Orthodox civilization. Maimed Hungary, which is of the part of the EU but is not in the Eurozone, is an interesting border state. Of course, Transylvania is on the Orthodox side.

Perhaps, with hindsight, one can say that the attempt of Kemal Atatürk and his kin to turn Turkey into a quasi-Western European state was on the one hand a dismal failure and on the other a beautiful and possibly realizable dream. This question is being fought on the streets not only of Constantinople but of Istanbul as well. The Europeanized intellectuals publish on one side, the European side of the Bosphorus, while the People no doubt have their own publicists, churning out less scholarly texts on the other side.

Oh for Troy! Oh for the Golden Fleece. Send in the Argonauts.

Few would want to argue with Henry Kissinger that the partition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire by the Allies after World War I destabilized not only Europe but the entire world to this present day. The tempest in a teapot that is Hungary is a continuing epicenter of this perturbation, and the figure of Viktor Orbán is at the polarizing and polarized heart of it. Hungary is right at the heart of Europe, and that heart is broken. The result of polarization. Can you mend a broken heart?

Perhaps, but probably not by raising blood pressure.

Hungary is sick all right, but hardly the Sick Man of Europe.

South Pacific

As someone who regularly resides in Seoul, and as someone who definitely sees the United States as having had Victory at Sea in the Pacific, I find it a little odd to see Australasia as part of the West, but I certainly get it. On the other hand, the placing of the center of this map someplace in Spain, and not really showing the Pacific, nor the Hawaiian Islands, nor the International Date Line, is an error that is not forgivable after Mike Todd filmed *Around the World in 80 Days*. Surely Huntington knows better; this is intentional insanity underplaying the role of America as a great Pacific power. His is still a flat world, centered on the middle of the Atlantic Ocean—and it is also without Antarctica or the South Polar Regions.

Volumes should be written about the negatives (white, colorless, unpatterned) places on Huntington's map (in addition to the omitted ones). Mongolia. Tibet. Negative Space? Oh yes, these are the Buddhist Islands. No Man's Land.

I point these things out for two reasons. One is to let me back into China, and the other to comment on Huntington's interesting choice to make Japan a civilization all its own. This will get me back to Abe—and then I will just slip up to Russia, and shake hands with Vlad.

But before I do that, let me regress. Of the two books, clearly Magyar's anthology is the more overtly hostile, confrontational, and uncompromising. No good can come of this. The hostility of Janke's work is less blatant, more gray-gloved, and more subtle—but it is hostile and confrontational as well. Nothing good can come of the Cold War in Hungary!



Figure 16.1. Huntington's map of world civilizations.

The East is Red

Huntington's Korea is colored Sinic, Red. Not Red Russia; Red China (see Figure 16.1). Indeed, the East is Red, but the Koreans, North, and South have learned to play off the Reds against the Greens; The Blues against the Violets... Surely we do see the Reds rising. The Koreans do not suffer from Huntington's chorea as Westerlings do. This is partly racial in the literal sense and partly cultural in the analogical sense. There is of course tons of invective there, too. On both sides of the 38th parallel. The Koreans too are a border people, and one divided like ethnic Hun-

garians could be said to be. Many things about Seoul remind me of Budapest, not the least of which is that everything is about angles, and everyone has an angle. This is all okay.

I think that both Koreas have, nevertheless, found an easier accommodation with their own history, culture, race, and religion(s) (or lack of them) than I fear either Viktor or his opponents have. For all the visible discord between and with the two Koreas, we nevertheless still do not have toilet paper there emblazoned with the portrait of the head of the head of government and selling at the equivalent of \$5 a roll.¹⁷

Somehow the depth of hatred and ridicule heaped upon Viktor marks and is accompanied by a degree of scatology that would be hard to find elsewhere. Certainly not in the evolving nationalism of China nor in its deep inner divisions.

Coloring Korea in Red, with China, is not inaccurate, but it is more accurate than Coloring Hungary as Violet. The North is not Korea's Transylvania. Korea does not have a missing limb.

Coloring Japan (the Home Islands Only Mind You) as its own distinct green civilization is not entirely wrong, but it does shortchange East Asia, which *is* fundamentally one civilization. This is Huntington's divide-and-conquer strategy against Our Enemies. It isolates Honest Abe.

Oh yes, Vlad. The reemergence of Russia as a Eurasian power is one of the remarkable developments in 21st-century history. Surely Vlad is the 21st Century Fox. Any Hungarian who has any sense will realize that Hungary is suspended between Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. It would seem to me that with the enormous popularity and success of Viktor (the luxury toilet paper is an odd homage to this), any opposition to him, if it is to be effective, will have to rise above vilification. Moreover, it will have to have a positive program and not merely an opposition to what is wrong. The problem here, then, is that as I see these two books, Janke offers a positive program much more evidently than Magyar does.

Apacsok

Back in 2011, Krisztina Horváth, who represented herself as Jane Bolond,¹⁸ took me to see the movie version of *Apacsok*.¹⁹ The endless fascination with the Kádár era, with Karl May, with Hungary's own version of May, Fehér Szarvas (white stag), and indeed Viktor's unmitigated love of the fairy tale *Once Upon a Time in the West*, all sheds an interest-

ing light on the one hand on Huntington's American eye on the world, on chapter paper as written by me, and on this book, edited by an American and a Hungarian. The angle to and from *Hajrá, magyarok!* as well as *Magyar polip* may help us to understand perhaps a little more deeply and completely the status of the Hungarian Patient.

Dark Vic Tory.

Notes and references

- 1 Igor Janke, *Hajrá, magyarok!* (Budapest: Rézbong, 2013) Translated into Hungarian and adapted from the Polish original. The title could be translated as *OK, Hungarians!* or perhaps *Go For It, Hungarians!* or perhaps *Hail to You, Hungarians!*
- 2 Bálint Magyar, ed. *Magyar polip: A posztkommunista maffiaállam* (Budapest: Noran Libro, 2013). The title translates as *Hungarian Polyp* (but more of this later). The subtitle translates as *The Postcommunist Mafia State*.
- 3 I am having trouble communicating the flavor of the word *power* in this context. The author is referring to the direct power of government—not merely the power of possessing something. He is trying to convey an implication that the Orbánchiks are engaging in a new form of nationalization or expropriation.
- 4 Magyar, *Magyar polip*, 7. My translation.
- 5 Janke, *Hajrá, magyarok!*, 10. My translation.
- 6 Magyar, *Magyar polip*, 413.
- 7 Whether the allusion is to Hungary as New Jersey or Sicily, this is at once a simplification, and a highly sophisticated and multilayered indictment.
- 8 *Mickey Magnate (Mágnás Miska)* is a Hungarian comedy film directed by Márton Keleti. It was based on a popular stage musical comedy that was previously turned into the 1916 silent film *Miska the Magnate*, directed by Alexander Korda.
- 9 This is an intentional “misprint.”
- 10 Jamil Anderlini and Lucy Hornby, “China overtakes US as world’s largest goods trader,” *Financial Times*, last updated January 10, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7c2dbd70-79a6-11e3-b381-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3KbLx032O> (accessed January 9, 2014). Record trade figures in December suggest China overtook the US as the world’s largest goods trader in 2013.
- 11 I simply do not have the space here to discuss the special case of South Korea. It is not that it is not worth doing so, but in the context of Hungarian events it would not be worthwhile.
- 12 Janke, *Hajrá, magyarok!*, 294.
- 13 The name translates as *lion-hearted life giver*.
- 14 Magyar, *Magyar polip*, 393.
- 15 Mind you, this is not an objective description. But it is not far off from the popular legend.

16 1

When Britain first, at Heaven's command
Arose from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang this strain:
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

2

The nations, not so blest as thee,
Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

3

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful, from each foreign stroke;
As the loud blast that tears the skies,
Serves but to root thy native oak.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

4

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame:
All their attempts to bend thee down,
Will but arouse thy generous flame;
But work their woe, and thy renown.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

5

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine:
All thine shall be the subject main,
And every shore it circles thine.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

6

The Muses, still with freedom found,
Shall to thy happy coast repair;
Blest Isle! With matchless beauty crown'd,
And manly hearts to guard the fair.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

- 17 “Nemzeti Együttműködés Vécépapírja,” Kreatív Kontroll Kft., <http://mutyipapir.hu/> (accessed June 20, 2014).
- 18 This translates as Jane the Fool.
- 19 Dóra Gyárfás, “Ha én besúgó volnék,” *Origo*, November 11, 2010, <http://www.origo.hu/filmklub/blog/kritika/20101111-ha-en-besugo-volnek-apacsok-kritika-torok-ferenc-csanyi.html> (accessed June 20, 2014). The film was directed by Ferenc Török.

Democratic Resurgence in Hungary: Challenges to Oppositional Movement (An Open-Ended Conclusion)

Jon Van Til

Introduction: A Problem 1,000 Years in the Making

If the future is the child of the past, mediated by a thin moving line of present moments that link these seeming infinities, then Hungary will continue to be a worried land. The cloudy colors¹ of its dismal 20th-century history and its troubled entry to the 21st—so often brown or red and nearly always muddy—presage a future with continuing disjunctions and desperate reaches toward impossible dreams and probable disasters.

This concluding chapter reviews the prospects for a successful civil-society-led democratic resurgence in Hungary. “Success,” in this context, does not necessarily mean electoral victory or the reshaping of Hungarian society. Rather, it means, as the cultural historian Herbert J. Muller might have put it, a determined and thoughtful effort to combat powerful forces of fear and greed in the name of human dignity and freedom.² Such a struggle, even if not patently “successful” in its efforts to triumph in its declared campaigns, realizes the potential of the “tragic vision” of aspiration and struggle that marks the high points of many struggles in many times and places by voluntary organizations within the third sectors of disparate civil societies.

Success for a resurgent civil society in Hungary will likely not be achieved within the flow of months, or even years. When movements seek to reconstruct and revitalize an entire national society—a country with a tumultuous history that spans 1,000 years—its task falls to history for a

final evaluation, for nothing less than a reshaping of the future is every movement's goal. This chapter begins with a review of how such a transformational form might emerge in our own time and place.

Previous, and Usually Failed, Attempts to Build Hungarian Democracy

The travails of the Hungarian past illustrate the ever-present specter of political failure. If things can go wrong, much of Hungarian history since the coronation of Matthias indicates that they will. Particularly in the 20th century, a parade of misguided leaders and terrifying tyrants have succeeded each other in dizzying rapidity, unleashing on their constituents as dismal a set of public policies and practices as found anywhere in the North and the West. One after another came ruling perversions both from abroad and from contemporary pretenders—from Hitler, Szálasi, and Eichmann to Stalin, Rákosi, and Kádár to the contemporary supporters of the neoracist Jobbik party.³

If one sought the monuments along this trail of governmental failure, they would be found in prisons, death marches, forced work, and recurrent states of economic collapse. In somewhat more benign moments, their contemporary creations take the form of overnight rewritings of the national constitution, ludicrous propaganda masquerading as art, and feeble efforts to promulgate the supremacy of “Hungarian” culture over Jewish and Roma versions. Even with the coming of democratic capitalism and the “political changes” of 1989, political primacy has alternated between efforts at leadership by millionaire “socialists” and patronage-driven political machines.

If the future comes to resemble the past in Hungary, a modicum of social harmony and justice is not likely to emerge from political sources, as such visions have never served to unite this endemically divided land. Nor does transformation have much chance to emerge from religious sources: majoritarian religion in Hungary has served secular interests of nationalist fervor for most of the past thousand years.

It may only be from the wellsprings of civil society that prospects for social transformation hold any real chance of emerging in Hungary, but even their improbability is indicated by their failure to anchor lasting change when given a chance to do so, as in the years immediately following the political changes of 1989.

Nevertheless, slim as its chances might be, a recurring vision appears among Hungarian activists: Civil society organizations, disgusted with the

failure of Hungarian politics, unite in a solidaristic movement and fulfill the visions of 1989 by advocating and then developing a hopeful, democratic, just, and productive society.⁴

The Bleak Hungarian Present

A recent survey conveyed the bad news.⁵ When it comes to “group-based enmity,” Hungary is at the bottom of the pile. The rest of Europe, violence-prone and racist as it sometimes seems to be, appears in a major EU report to be more civilized and less prejudiced than its neighbor to the east. In almost every dimension of supremacist orientation (anti-immigrant attitudes, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim attitudes, sexism, and homophobia), Hungarians outpoint their neighbors. They come across as a surly, self-centered, and provincial set of folks.

Not only do the survey results find Hungarians to be backward and angry, but they also appear to be economically challenged. Only Poland has a lower economic standing, but Hungary manages to produce the highest unemployment rate, and nine out of ten of its respondents report a “negative economic outlook” (third behind Portugal and Poland and over twice as high as the Netherlands).

With only 3,000 Muslims and 300,000 “migrants” (mostly Hungarian speakers from Romania), Hungarians report great sensitivity to the impact of this 3 percent of their population, with nearly half (44.6 percent) agreeing that “Because of the number of immigrants, I sometimes feel like a stranger in [my country].” When the authors compute their index of anti-immigrant attitudes, Hungary’s score is “significantly highest.”

The same story occurs for anti-Semitism: a whopping seven out of ten Hungarians agree that Jews have “too much influence” in their country, and the other items calculated by the authors lead once more to a first-place ranking for Hungary.

Even in the area of racism, Hungarians, without any racial minorities, lead the way in expressing racist prejudice. On every item—assuming a “natural hierarchy” of races, opposing interracial marriage, seeing some races as more “gifted” than others, and asserting a “need to protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures”—Hungarians outscore the other seven countries.

The 3,000 Muslims resident in Hungary seem “too many” for 60 percent of the Hungarian sample, who arrive in similar numbers at the conclusion that its miniscule numbers of Muslims are “too demanding.”

Hungary shares with Poland and Italy the highest ranking in anti-Muslim sentiment.

On homophobia and sexism, Hungary again wins high scores, trailing only Poland in opposition to gay marriage and homosexuality, but leading the pack in support traditional family roles for women and deference to male primacy in the workplace.

The Deeper Structure of the Hungarian Crisis

What lies behind the contemporary failures of the Hungarian polity and society? Four underlying factors seem central: traditionalism, apprehensiveness, confusion, and social isolation. Each factor is considered below.

1. Traditionalism

There is no question that the large rural, village, and small-town base of Hungary's population reflects traditional values. Marriage is defined as only between man and woman, and sexual expression is limited to its bounds; women's role is primary only in the establishment and maintenance of the family, and men are expected to carry primacy in its economic support. On a global level, white people are seen to carry the lead role in the creation and advance of civilization. Religious diversity is not valued even though belief is not particularly high.

2. Apprehensiveness

Zick and his colleagues report on a number of questions as to how respondents were viewing their economic situation as of 2008.⁶ Hungarians were far more pessimistic than those in the other seven countries. Nine in ten (as in Italy, Portugal, and Great Britain) saw the economy doing badly; two in three reported their personal situation as bad; three in four saw that others were worse off than they. Now, six years after the survey, can anyone see improvement? This is a country in which citizens knew they were in crisis and whose justified fears are reflected in the current realities of reduced pensions; mortgages up to and beyond the hilt; employment blacklists; and the constant consideration of, and by many, search for, employment elsewhere in Europe and even overseas.

3. Confusion

There are two points in the EU survey where the confusion among Hungarians is particularly apparent. Like most of the respondents in each country, the overwhelming majority of Hungarians (four in five) reported being confused by many issues in modern life. When asked to answer three questions about their preferences regarding the integration, assimilation, or separation of immigrant groups, the overwhelming majority of the sample chose both integration and separation, reflecting the country's particular post-Trianon minority situation.⁷

When political preference was polled, 12 percent favored the right, 9 percent the left, and 69 percent called themselves “moderate.” The 2010 and 2014 national elections, viewed in the context of those figures, might thus be considered more as a rejection of the previous governance than a mandate for anything new.

4. Social isolation

Perhaps the starkest of the survey's findings deal with the social isolation of Hungarians. Excepting contact with neighbors, which is at about the European average, Hungarians are isolated from each other—81 percent report difficulty in finding “real friends” and 85 percent report that relationships are becoming more unstable. Hungarians are isolated from political life and meaning—58 percent report little interest in politics; a whopping 41 percent (three to times times higher than in other countries) report no interest in solving social problems; and 83 percent report that politicians are not interested in their views (although half assert that they themselves “have a say” in what the government does). And, perhaps most dramatically, Hungarians are isolated from participation in their society—only 28 percent report being a member of an organization, in one of the very few questions where Hungarians fall far below even the Poles and the Portuguese, whose membership rates approach 50 percent.⁸

Facing the Future: In (Societal) Sickness and Health

The problems each age faces are of course unique, but the coming crises of the 21st century, undergirded as they will be by ecological uncertainties and the leveling impact of globalization on our overburdened planet, suggest that the nations of the North and West will not enjoy the kind of economic growth that characterized recent centuries.

The four major societal sectors⁹ within Hungary—government, economy, family, and civil society—will surely be tested as never before in the years ahead. Government, if it continues to act as an operetta dictatorship (lots of form but precious little content) cannot be counted on for much help in solving the real problems of society. Business, in a time of downsizing and high unemployment, will continue to provide products and services, but these will be restricted, as always, to those who are able to purchase them.

And what then of the third and fourth sectors? The family and its surrounding kinship networks, always strong in Hungary, will be called upon to share their strengths and resources more broadly among members. Young adults will find it more and more difficult to locate employment, and their parents will be called upon to keep them at home, to feed and clothe them, and to provide them personal assurance as they deal with the stresses involved in extending the period of family dependency. Such stresses may also be expected to result in increased drug use, adventures in the informal economy that may cross boundaries of legality, the deferral of marriage and childbearing, and increasing levels of out-migration of young adults in the desperate search for employment.

As for civil society (the nonprofit sector, the third sector, the voluntary sector): Will the time that opens up as employment diminishes lead to a rise in community caring and voluntary participation? Or will the stresses involved in declining living standards, ongoing unemployment, and political favoritism serve only to intensify intergroup tensions and violence?

We know that times of economic difficulty lead to increases in levels of social need, but that levels of philanthropic and government funding of civil society organizations do not keep pace with such rising needs. Rather, in times of economic decline, both philanthropic giving and government support of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) declines. Problems increase as capacity decreases.¹⁰ The welfare state gives way to the “farewell state.”¹¹ Only police budgets rise, in a desperate effort to cope with increasing levels of crime and disorder among the increasingly large and desperate sectors of individuals in society.

Civil society, like the family, finds itself greatly put upon in such an era. The Hobbesian vision of social war, each against each, increasingly takes form as the dominant social paradigm of our age—not only in Hungary but also throughout the world, rich and poor, North and South, East and West.

Hungary, it would appear, is a prime candidate for what might best be called “cold civil strife.”¹² Its political party system has lost its capacity to

moderate conflict; its financial distress promises increasing levels of downward mobility for middle-class individuals and families, fueled by rising unemployment and personal indebtedness; its associational sector, never strong, has been decimated by its inability to counter the vagaries of public support with voluntary and philanthropic support.

The Awakening of Oppositional Movement¹³

As a society, then, Hungary suffers from division, distrust, and disappointment. It may be too much to expect any more from its political life, which rests on that social base.

Indeed, in a scant period of two decades, democracy emerged and then failed in Hungary. And with it civil society also languished. The hopes of 1989 that a “third way” would be discovered in Hungary, neither socialist nor capitalist, but democratic and participatory, have all but disappeared from the purview of Hungarian citizens, replaced by the recognition that, to modify the title of Sinclair Lewis’s 1935 novel, “it is happening here.” Democracy is being lost, replaced by a sometimes bumbling but always determined syndicate firmly under the control of a few oligarchs and fronted by a man sometimes known throughout his land as “Viktator.”

For those remaining active in civil society, a long dependence on state funding has led to a rapid depletion of association budgets, as the government’s blacklists extend to organizations as well as individuals. Greatly reduced in their programs and facilities are such civil-society bastions as Kulturinnov, the Foundation for Social Innovation (SZIA), the Hungarian Filmmakers’ Association, the Nonprofit Information and Training Center (NIOK) Foundation, the Regional Social Welfare Resource Center of Budapest (BSZF), numerous religious institutions, and dozens of other stalwart organizations.

With no established traditions of personal or corporate philanthropy, many Hungarian NPOs relied for years on the significant contributions of George Soros. But the society, even with its state-revenue program allowing 1 percent of tax payments to be directed to NPOs, failed to develop a funding base outside of government sources. Following the 2010 elections, these resources were quickly diverted to support only those civil society organizations firmly within the camp of the ruling party. The independence of the 1 percent national fund was replaced by state domination, removing a vital vehicle for the self-determination of civil society.

The response of civil-society organizations to this sudden transfer of resources to those loyally connected to the Fidesz regime was, as might be expected, a combination of denial and desperation. Proposals were amassed for sending to increasingly remote and unlikely funding sources; staff cutbacks occurred; and those professionals finding themselves suddenly unemployed made their rounds among former colleagues, friends, and family—accumulating expressions of sympathy and, only occasionally, a part-time or volunteer contract.

The 2014 Elections: Failure of Oppositional Politics

Achieving the goal of replacing the ruling group with a government respectful of the needs of a modern democratic citizenry proved to be impossible. The ruling Fidesz party, and to its right, the Jobbik party, continued to offer the simple ideas that have so often attracted the Hungarian electorate: nationalist pride and, in the case of Jobbik, group-based enmity. On the left of the ruling party, one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.¹⁴ A set of small and shrinking parties competed with each other for a share of votes insufficient to return any of them to any semblance of power. The largest party that lost the 2010 elections divided into two even weaker units. The green party not only divided itself, but seemed to take pride in not cooperating with any other party in the sad dance of electoral decline.

The electoral calculus became complicated and increasingly perverse. The rules were devised and set by the ruling party, and not surprisingly, eventuated in the outcome of its decisive victory, and may well again in future elections.

Working from its base in the civil sector, a citizen movement calling itself the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Solidarity) aspired to bring reason to this process. But its early leadership confronted daunting organizational tests, and signs of organizational fatigue were evident shortly after its appearance, following a dramatic and well-attended demonstration on January 2, 2012. The movement managed only to field relatively uneventful demonstrations on the first of the two national days of marching (March 15), when it was clearly outplayed by Fidesz and Jobbik gatherings with greater color and passion.

A dramatic effort to create a coalition, Together 2014 (E2014), announced on the second day of celebration (October 23) in 2012, soon faltered in its efforts to make a viable run for electoral power. As of March 2013, polls indicated support as follows: Fidesz, 18 percent; the Hungar-

ian Socialist Party (MSZP), 13 percent; Jobbik, 8 percent; E2014, 3 percent. If the majority were to rule, the undecideds (many of whom are quite disaffected) would win hands-down at 55 percent.¹⁵ On April 7, 2014, Fidesz was returned to power, retaining its two-thirds majority in parliament.

It Ain't Easy, McGee: The Process of Democracy Development

Folk wisdom dictates that, in politics, "You can't beat somebody with nobody." The current prime minister may not be the most attractive political figure, and he certainly might have been tarnished by a determined negative campaign. But Hungary's political culture is very direct and very tough, and the prime minister consistently proves a master at its games. In 2014, one challenging leader after another, left and right, fell like dominoes before charges, however dubious, of corruption and turpitude.

It is also said that politics "breeds strange bedfellows" and often presents circumstances in which its leaders "must all hang together lest they hang separately." The ruling group can use Jobbik on its right to appear properly civilized and "European." And it can play the ambitions of its competitors on the left against each other with the mathematics of the rules it set for its own domination of the electoral process. If the 2014 elections proved anything, it was that the opposition was completely unable to come "Together in 2014." The Hungarian case of democratic reconstruction, it was clear, would be an arduous one, its early chapters standing far from any promise of successful accomplishment.

Claiming the Third Space in Hungary

Hungary's civil society, it is clear, has largely failed to assert itself against the power of government during its 25-year experiment with democracy following the political changes of 1989. But in the early months of 2014, a remarkable civil resurgence occurred in an unlikely corner of Hungarian society. The Fidesz regime found itself challenged by an increasingly bitter disagreement with important players within Budapest's Jewish community. Over this period, the main representative organization of that community, the otherwise conformist Mazsihisz, took an unprecedentedly independent stance toward the ruling party and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Mazsihisz publicly objected to major appointments to several state-initiated projects marking the 70th anniversary of the German Nazi occupation of Budapest, and the drastic increase in the level of Holocaust atrocity this occupation provoked in Hungary. Most visibly, this leading Jewish organization took a public role in opposing the construction of a highly controversial and dubiously conceived statue proposed by the government to mark this anniversary. In an unprecedented fashion, Mazsihisz rejected the offer of state funding to support several community-based remembrance activities of the 1944 events. In a country long accustomed to dependence on government funding of religious organizations, this rejection of financial support from the government was important news indeed.



Photo 17.1. The Nazi occupation monument with the “Living Monument” in front of it created by the protestors, Liberty Square, Budapest, August 2014.
(Courtesy of Bálint Kaszics)

The construction site of the statue became “ground zero” for a spontaneous protest movement, whose members first sought physically to restrain the erection of the monument. After a few days, police forces prevented access to the immediate site, and the protesters turned to the development of a remarkable “living monument” directly next to the monument site. Visitors began to bring mementos of the Hungarian past and assem-

bled them around the construction site. Vivid documentation of the changing scene was provided by activist photographer Gabriella Csoszó.¹⁶

Beyond Politics: Prospects for Civil Society

In today's Hungary, as many chapters in this book indicate, a duly elected government appears bent on creating a one-party state that controls nearly every aspect of the country's life—public, civic, voluntary, and even religious. Hungary's third sector confronts multiple challenges as it seeks to encourage citizen initiative and participation within the narrow confines provided by the Fidesz government.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán appears to have secured lasting power for himself by utilizing governing techniques he learned as an oppositional movement leader fighting the Sovietized autocracy of the late 1980s. Whatever he does seems to work, at least in assuring repeated reelection. Various identified by its critics as a “mafia,” “octopus,” or “Franken-state” practicing crony capitalism within the context of an “operetta revolution,” the Orbán government functions as a highly effective political machine. Indeed, Orbán himself has already secured nine mentions in the dystopian resource book, *The Dictator's Handbook*.¹⁷

The third sector has been turned inside out in Orbán's Hungary. Philanthropy finds itself subject to state control and direction; the participatory processes of civil society find themselves closely sniffed by the big nose of the state in the form of blacklists and grant favoritism; and the independence of what Americans have come to call the (at least partially) “independent sector” is reduced to a set of complaisant organizations placed on what political scientist Merle Fainsod once called the “transmission belt”¹⁸ of an authoritarian society.

A rather bizarre case in point is found in a contemporary conflict between the Norwegian government, acting as a philanthropist to Hungary under the peculiar folkways of the EU, and the Hungarian government, which took exception to a grant awarded to an NPO it finds too closely associated with a rival political party.

According to press reports, Hungary's position is that “it would like Norway to extend the suspension over the three funds disbursing monies allocated to civic organizations and to renegotiate the entire programme structure of the scheme. . . . The most important aim in connection with the Norway Grants scheme is to ensure that only state bodies should fulfil tasks connected with the management of funding. . . . Norwegian funding

for NGOs is currently transferred through [a] Foundation which appears to be an NGO but in reality is a satellite organization” of [a] small opposition [party].”¹⁹

So, the brave new world of the Hungarian third sector is revealed: Grants may be received from sources outside the government, but only if they are managed by the government and are directed to organizations it approves.

So much for encouraging philanthropic giving—“give only to me” is the government’s message. So much for an independent third sector—“organize only what we approve” is the government’s message. So much for encouraging social participation and innovation in the civil sector—“do only what we tell you” is the government’s message to its third-sector leaders.

In both the long and short run, Hungary is likely to suffer from the majoritarian zeal of Orbán’s desire to run it all. Even the strongest ruler stands to benefit from citizen interest in resolving society’s problems—especially those problems that the government seems nearly always unable to resolve—poverty, unemployment, pride in ethnicity and lifestyle, disaster relief, substance abuse, comfort for those in need or distress.

Not only does the third sector provide effective services needed throughout society, but it also permits new ideas for policy and change to emerge. Some of these ideas will of course be critical of established ways and policies, and of the actions of entrenched officials bent on retaining their authority and control. But philanthropy allows both new ideas and new moneys to flow, addressing problems government cannot resolve. And citizen participation unlocks energies that might otherwise be directed toward individual and collective frustration and disillusion.

Viktor Orbán and his ruling party can benefit from the emergence of philanthropy, the establishment of an independent third sector, and a civil respect for civil society groups, ideas, and programs throughout Hungary. Not only are these rights protected by Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but they are also underwritten by Hungary’s membership in the EU. When the time comes to give a final assessment of the social health of Hungary in the Orbán era, what will count will not be how many years he served in office, but what his country became during those years of service.

Beyond April 2014

Contrary to popular fears within the opposition movements described in this book, Hungarian history did not end following the April 2014 elections, even though Viktor Orbán was returned to power in another parliamentary landslide. Following on that victory, the manifold oppositional movements and parties within Hungary will need to face a choice among at least three options we will mention here: (1) persist with more of the same mix of protest and politics; (2) draw a sharper distinction between political and civil action; and (3) join the one victorious party in what will clearly have become again a one-party state.

Option 1 means continuing the boundary-spanning activity documented in this book—attempting to build effective political action on the bases provided by sporadic protest activities. The E2014 coalition, which sought to create a winning political campaign by combining the efforts of several citizen movements, and then invited the formal political parties to join in, adopted a promising but ultimately unsuccessful strategy, in large part owing to the leadership choices of the challenging parties with which it allied. One by one, these leaders elected to remain unelected, contenting themselves in several cases with the comforts of parliamentary representation in minority standing. Only one party played to win in 2014, and that was Viktor Orbán's Fidesz. And if Fidesz is ever to be defeated in the future, in 2018 or 2022 or beyond, it will likely be only after the emergence of a second strong, and unified, challenging party.

Option 2 is what One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla) chose in the first phase of its history—to separate politics from protest. This is a choice rejected by the civil sector after 1989, when it had its chance to be truly independent from the state. At that time the liberal denizens of that sector chose to cozy up to the state when its nominally socialist friends were in power, and now they endure the punishments of defunding and blacklisting as Fidesz rules the third sector with its iron laws of patronage and control. There's nothing wrong with being politically and civically active at the same period of time, the second option reminds us, but, as the Northern Irish case²⁰ shows, it makes good sense to leave your hats at the door when it comes time for meetings of groups that come to the belief that pseudodemocratic processes as imposed by authoritarian mandate must be countered if real democracy is to be built.

Option 3 follows the argument, not unknown in Hungarian history, that if the powers that be offer only one party—join it. Or, as the folk expression puts it, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." If a political system pro-

duces only one party capable of being elected—and that is Fidesz in its time and place—it is at least theoretically plausible for masses to flood into its membership, seeking to make it responsible to the country as a whole. The example of the American Tea Party and its capture of the Republican Party is a case in point.

Election Day 2014 has now passed, but history will continue in Hungary, proceeding to reveal itself as always, day by day. There will be continuing efforts to build a second party to challenge Fidesz in 2018 and beyond, and there will be efforts by civic organizations to manifest public dismay and disgust with the policies Fidesz will impose during its new term(s) in office. Such will be Hungarian politics redux, as the domination of the still young Viktor Orbán continues apace, day by day and term by term.

The challenges that lie ahead for Hungary will present themselves to *both* the regime and its oppositional forces.²¹ There will continue to be Hungarians who will recognize the importance of rediscovering and revitalizing the intellectual capital provided by its leading thinkers, lest the country become mired in outdated supremacist nationalism, ill suited to the success of its citizens in a global economy. Those willing and able to devote their lives to the development of viable democracy will need to teach the courses and write the books and deliver the speeches and grant the interviews and attract the resources that will shape the visions of rising generations of active citizen participants. New 21st-century institutions—web-based think tanks and dialogue centers—will need to be created to formulate creative thought and generate accepted consensus throughout the society—not just in Budapest but in the vast Hungarian countryside as well. And new ways of disseminating policy will need to be discovered and developed and disseminated from border to border, and even beyond.²²

The Importance of Hungary

Why, one properly wonders, is this book important, and not just in Hungary, but in the world beyond? It is easy, after all, to dismiss Hungary as an area of concern. While it was for centuries an important player in global politics, owing to its long role as a Habsburg partner and later a sometime beacon for hope in the long struggle against Nazi and Soviet rule, Hungary has seen its prominence dwindle in the global society of the 21st century. Its political, economic, and social struggles receive only intermittent attention

in the world press, and then usually just for episodes tinged by residual anti-Semitic tones. Most of the time this small, landlocked nation of 10 million persons is noticed and remembered, if at all, as being somewhere in global “flyover country,” hardly counting in contrast to the important events unfolding in almost every other corner of the world.

But for social theorists and social scientists, what is happening in Hungary is front-burner stuff. The world marveled in 2008 at the rise of Barack Obama from a minor position in Illinois to the presidency in a few short years, but few observed that the vehicle that brought him to power was less the nomination of a major party than a civil society movement organized in large part outside the structure of conventional politics. In Hungary in the 2010s, an important step was taken—the effort to unseat a powerful political machine by a coalition of organizations largely located outside the boundaries of conventional politics.

Such boundary shifts have been noted by social theorists such as Talcott Parsons and Jürgen Habermas. “Boundary wars” between the third sector, government, and business are seen as erupting from time to time.²³ On the boundary between association and state, for example, there exists a recurrent flash point. On the one hand is the recognition of citizen impact, through groups, on government policy and action—surely a desirable aspect of democracy. On the other hand lies the dark side of democracy, often used by illiberal authoritarians, where third-sector organizations become transmission belts for dictated policies and practices. There one finds the blue smoke and mirrors of “special interests,” political action committees, and media-driven mass participation.

In the United States, the power of the civic movement that elected Obama, himself experienced as a community organizer, was unusual but not wholly foreign. Within two years, a determined opposition to his person and imagined values emerged in the form of another movement beyond the political boundary—the Tea Party, with its efforts to replace the Republican Party as the locus of conservatism in America.

For a civil society movement to mount a serious challenge to an entrenched machine as strong as Orbán’s Fidesz in Hungary—this may be seen as a sign that things are shifting in a corner of the world in which politics has long been assumed to reign supreme, and third-sector organizations are expected to play insignificant and deferent roles to political power. The determined effort by a coordinated set of movement organizations—left, center, and right—in Hungary, detailed in the chapters of this book, to provide civic voice and to achieve electoral influence, is worth the attention of thoughtful observers throughout the world.

Today such civil society campaigns may characterize only a few societies and those intermittently, but tomorrow these efforts may become global fixtures in the redrawing of the boundary lines between civil society and political party. Or, it may turn out that today's Hungarian ruler will have redrawn the boundaries more adeptly, and taught his governing peers in many other lands that by means of creating an "economically nationalist" state, the EU (and other federal bodies) can be defied and authoritarian power assured for years to come.²⁴ In any case, the outcome of the struggles documented in this book will echo both within Hungary, and well beyond its borders, in the years ahead.

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- 12 Van Til, *Growing Civil Society*, 153. I build this concept following on the classic conceptual work of political scientist Austin Ranney.
- 13 Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987). On the meanings of "opposition," no voice is clearer or more powerful than that of Havel.
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- 20 Jon Van Til, *Breaching Derry's Walls: The Quest for a Lasting Peace in Northern Ireland* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011).
- 21 Havel, *Living in Truth*. For such a social blueprint, Hungarians can hardly do better than consulting a former neighbor, Vaclav Havel, who writes convincingly of regime and opposition.
- 22 Among the creative ideas that have been presented for such a civil society resurgence are the "electronic wall" proposed by sociologist Gábor Hegyesi, which would allow for the immediate consideration of policy initiatives by means of expert and citizen comment and analysis, and the "platform of platforms" proposed by social entrepreneur Gábor Karsai, which would provide a way for civic organizations throughout the country to assert their positions and engage in dialogue with fellow organizations and citizens.
- 23 Van Til, *Growing Civil Society*, chapter 3.
- 24 The English-speaking reader is referred to the useful and insightful blog of Eva S. Balogh, *Hungarian Spectrum*, as a way of keeping up with such developments in Hungary: <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/>.

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